LANGUAGE AND JUSTIFICATION:

RICHARD RORTY'S THERAPEUTIC PHILOSOPHY

by

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Dedicated to my mother and father

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Framed within Richard Rorty's understanding of how language and social practices serve as the ground for human knowledge, this dissertation explores the problems of language, justification, and truth. First I examine Rorty's treatment of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy. The shift from conceptual to propositional knowledge is central to Rorty's understanding of the concept of justification. In an attempt to better understand Rorty's project, I turn to the work of several of his critics: John McDowell, Richard Bernstein, and Jürgen Habermas. I map out the ways in which these theorists critique Rorty's therapeutic approach to philosophy and his separation of the private and public spheres. In Chapter Two, I examine Wilfrid Sellars's idea of the Myth of the Given and the attempt by Rorty and McDowell to deal with its implications for language and justification. McDowell is my chief interlocutor in Chapter Three where I continue to explore Rorty's idea of linguistic redescription and the charge McDowell raises concerning coherentism (linguistic idealism). Rorty argues that the implications of the Myth of the Given lead to the conclusion that the world can cause us to have beliefs, but it can never justify our beliefs.

McDowell maintains that, in order to count as knowledge, the claims we make must receive "friction" from the world to which they are answerable. In Chapter Four, I consider Rorty's attempt to dissolve philosophical problems rather than offering a theory that proposes to solve them. This is the essence of therapeutic philosophy, but I argue that Rorty does not apply it consistently. I offer readings of two of Rorty's seminal works: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. I maintain that Rorty's therapeutic approach to epistemological skepticism in the former work takes on a theoretical dimension in the latter work that begins to look more reductionist than therapeutic or redescriptive. In Chapter Five, I return again to the idea of introspection and Rorty's treatment of Descartes. I consider the objections of John Searle and Charles Taylor to Rorty's linguistic pragmatism. Afterwards, I offer some thoughts concerning justification and language, with an eye towards the hermeneutical tradition, that point towards a conception of knowledge that, in my view, has the potential to connect normativity to a form of representational realism that does not fall back into the Myth of the Given.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOC	*Achieving Our Country*
CIS	*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*
CP	*Consequences of Pragmatism*
PMN	*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*
PSH	*Philosophy and Social Hope*
TLT	*The Linguistic Turn*
TP	*Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume* 3

PREFACE

> This permits us to read Dewey as saying: if you find yourself a slave, do not accept your masters' descriptions of the real; do not work within the boundaries of their moral universe. Instead, try to invent a reality of your own by selecting aspects of the world that lend themselves to the support of *your* judgment of the worthwhile life.[1]
>
> —Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress*

I have been interested in words and things for a long time. During my freshman year of college, a classmate offered the following diagnosis of the cause of U.S./Soviet Cold War tension: Perhaps, she said, if there were no uniforms there would be no wars. This analysis struck me as terribly wrong-headed. Uniforms are merely symbolic representations, aren't they? These are things that are worn for the sake of convenience—surface differences that signify the existence of something more important underneath. We do not shoot people, I thought, because of the color of their uniforms. We defend our side because we believe our way of life is good. We would like to think that these are rational commitments that cause us to defend our country and condemn the *raison d'être* that animates the moral/political perspective of our opponents. The uniform is an effect, not a cause. The important things, I thought, are the political and economic structures, underneath, that led to the tension in the first place. The uniform is just a visible symbol. I suppose what irritated me so much, in my classmate's suggestion, was the unstated, theoretical presupposition that an important connection exists between social change and the ways in which we symbolically represent "reality."

Needless to say, I do not think we can bring about world peace through a change in uniform. But at about the same time, people were beginning to discuss the importance of gender

[1] Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume* 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 216.

neutral language. "All human beings" was suggested as a replacement for the phrase "all men." But these were not the only ones. There were other terms and phrases being discussed, and these were not popular with everyone. I remember hearing conservative political columnist William F. Buckley Jr. express dismay over the suggestion that we should use the term "fresh persons" rather than calling first-year college students freshmen. The implication, which was not always discussed, was that these changes are needed because (1) the existing term reveals prejudices, either overt or hidden, within the members of the society, and that (2) the use of a new word will result in a more just society. It did seem to me that there was a connection between language and what we think of as reality, and I was even prepared to concede that much (but not all) of what we call "reality" is constituted linguistically, but the idea that our political thinking depends on overcoming interpretations and words, rather than experience and empirical reality, struck me as a bookish and ineffective approach to social and political thought.

The first reason, and perhaps the most obvious one, is that we are not the result of speaking. We speak, but we are not spoken. We create the words we use to describe. Even if we get it wrong, something inside us produces words about states of affairs we believe to exist outside us. Language does not speak *us*, we speak; we use language to speak about something else (which can include speaking about ourselves). But, we seem to intend to speak about matters we believe to have their own independent existence outside our minds. However, this "realist" intuition does not make our understanding about what justifies our beliefs true. And, in fact, critics who argue that justification concerns only what the community allows us to say will argue that these intuitions are part of the problem. To avoid making justification a matter of correspondence to a nonhuman standard, perhaps, as they suggest, it would be best to focus on

the ways in which we represent something to ourselves (whether we are talking about the color of uniforms or the meaning of words). But the problem with abandoning correspondence is that if there are no facts, if there are only interpretations, then, it seems, we will have difficulty distinguishing between facts and what have recently been labeled "alternative facts."[2]

It seemed to me that the critics who consciously focused on linguistic representation had an agenda whose acceptance seemed connected somehow to the relativistic conclusions we were led to believe we must draw as a consequence of the antirealist implications of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy. Looking back, what frustrated me was that their views (I was not yet familiar with terms such as semiotics) concerning knowledge, language, and reality were also views about language itself. I wondered if perhaps they were attempting to cinch the argument before it even got started. Since we could hardly deny that we were using words—especially when we were using words to talk about words, it was almost as if we had already conceded the main point. On the other hand, assuming the truth of one's conclusion before constructing premises designed to establish the conclusion, is a classic example of question begging. They were giving us a view of how things are, but was what they were giving us really a "view from nowhere?"[3] Was my classmate drawing normative conclusions concerning how to effect social

[2] Julie Hirschfield Davis and Mathew Rosenberg, "Slamming Media, Trump Advances Two Falsehoods," *The New York Times*, January 22, 2017, 1, 22. Nicholas Faindos, "White House Pushes 'Alternative Facts.' Here Are the Real Ones," *The New York Times*, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/22/us/politics/president-trump-inauguration-crowd-white-house.html (accessed April 29, 2017). Kellyanne Conway, counselor to President Donald Trump, said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that Mr. Trump's inauguration crowd was much larger than the media had reported. This claim was difficult to believe since aerial pictures showed a crowd that was much smaller than former President Barack Obama's crowd had been in 2009. When pressed about the issue Conway said that the White House had simply put forth "alternative facts."

[3] Thomas Nagel, *The View From Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press 1986). I would later become familiar with a phrase, first used by Thomas Nagel, one that seemed to capture the frustration I felt when talking about language, social change, and reality: criticizing a view of a situation without providing an account of your standpoint—the point of view from which you offer a view of the situation—is a "view from nowhere."

change, in reality, while arguing that we really had no access to "reality" in the first place? As a relativis`t and a social reformer, was she trying to have her cake and eat it too?

Of course, conservatives had their agenda as well, and it was replete with views concerning "reality" and the harmful effects of relativism. The complaint that "Political Correctness" was a form of Orwellian Newspeak rang a bit hollow to me. No one with the governmental power of Big Brother was telling us that we had to use the term "fresh persons" or that failure to do so would be regarded as *"doubleplusungood"* rather than bad. As I think about this issue at present, I am not sure who was actually making the bigger claim that "reality" was on their side. Certainly, a proponent of traditional epistemology is committed, at the theoretical level, to a theory that understands truth as conformity to a reality independent of our prejudices, and linguistic descriptions. Many traditional conservatives in the United States would see things this way.[4] But it is O'Brien, in *1984*, who tells Winston that history is a palimpsest. The idea

[4] Richard Weaver blames relativism for the rise of welfare-state capitalism and for the willingness of people in Western democracies to accept the arguments of liberal democrats. Weaver was horrified by the murder of six million Jews during the Second World War. His suspicion is that the old restraints that used to prevent such actions were no longer believed. In *Ideas Have Consequences*, published in 1948, Weaver traces contemporary relativism back to William of Ockham and the critique of universals in the fourteenth century. For Weaver, and other traditionalists like Russel Kirk, the "denial of everything transcending experience" means inevitably the "denial of truth." See George Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 33; Kim Philips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), 77. Transcendence functions as a check on liberalism's arguments concerning material progress. The notion that an "arch of history" justifies federal poverty programs is a political perspective that privileges the material depravation at the present time—placing emphasis on "this world"—as opposed to a perspective that treats human beings as spiritual beings in a most fundamental sense. Transcendence says that the present is understood in light of transcendent ideals that do not depend, exclusively, on our experiences in the present (or in the context of the present study we can say on our current linguistic practices). Liberals and communists make the mistake, as Weaver and other conservatives like William F. Buckley Jr. argue, of focusing too much on economic deprivation in the present. For Weaver, relativism is seen as an argument for, or at least one that leaves space for, everything from the educational reforms of John Dewey and FDR's New Deal, to the state planning we see in totalitarian societies such as the USSR. The linking of collectivism and totalitarianism is an important theoretical position that helps to facilitate the rise of conservative thought. Collectivism is, on the one hand, a moral perspective rooted in a Biblically-based moral imperative to take care of others (to be one's brother's keeper). But the two dimensions present in conservative fusion politics (traditionalist and libertarian) speak with two voices on collectivism. Totalitarianism is bad from a Christian perspective, but collectivism does not necessarily equate with the notion of governmental domination. See, for example, Nash, 156. We see evidence of

that truth is relative is not inherently liberal or conservative. But cutting human beings off from all attempts to talk about the "real world," and focusing instead on the symbols we use to represent a realty that we can never know, seemed to me, both then and now, to be just as dangerous as the naïve realism against which critics of foundational epistemology had originally argued. If conservatives were claiming to know the nature of reality, then were not deconstructionists also claiming something about reality—namely that it is unknowable?

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this disagreement in the work of Friedrich Hayek. His views were also shaped by the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, and the atrocities committed by the Nazi party during WW II. In the *Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944 while Hayek was teaching at the London School of Economics, he argues that planning "leads to dictatorship" and "the direction of economic activity" leads to "suppression of freedom. Unlike Weaver, Hayek, echoing Martin Heidegger, blames Cartesian rationalism and the Enlightenment for the rise of a mode of thought that aims at the prediction and control of nature, although Hayek would later criticize extreme forms of libertarianism. See Nash, 3-15. Relativism, in the view I am recommending, is not, in itself, an argument that points exclusively to liberalism's main tenants; however, Weaver thought he found the central problem that led to the changes in the twentieth century, changes he found troubling. I also think that transcendence is important, and I find that Richard Rorty's attempt to do politics without "mirrors" creates an approach to political and social thought that contains, to its detriment, no transcendence. This, I believe, is due to Rorty's determination to eliminate all vestiges of correspondence metaphysics. But unlike Weaver, however, I believe that stressing experience, as part of theory that attempts to bring back together the human mind and the surrounding world of experience, does yield a plausible theory of justice that we can use to counter both the relativism of Rorty (replete with his linguistic naturalism), and the "spiritual" transcendence of conservative intellectuals who understand principles as Platonic essences grasped by reason.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the Third Meditation in René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy,* the meditator proposes to continue his reflections, conversing with himself as it were, in order to render himself better known to himself.[5] But how do we converse with ourselves unless we do it in a preexisting language? Even so, it seems that we are aware of things that, in some sense, have come from outside of our minds and, whatever we say about these things, it seems that they represent more than mere words. Cartesian rationalism, while foundational, introduces a distinctive brand of skepticism that redefines "the mind" in such a way that private, subjective thinkers, each one of us, gain privileged access to these "objects" of introspection: our "ideas." Reflection, the epistemological dimension of his thought, focuses not just on the difference between appearance and reality; reflection on our "ideas," in the Cartesian sense, brings with it the possibility that these "ideas" do not represent external reality at all. But not everyone buys into this brand of epistemological skepticism. In the tradition that develops after the Cartesian revolution, we see many attempts to answer the skepticism introduced in the wake of Cartesian rationalism.

The story I am telling focuses on our present use of words in place of the ideas thought to be so important to Descartes. But why did talk of propositional knowledge come to replace conceptual knowledge in the tradition of philosophy-as-epistemology from Descartes to Kant? Going back to St. Augustine's picture theory of language, we see an assumption that there exists, at the level of introspection, a difference between words and things—knowledge, in this view,

[5] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in *The Philosophical Writing of Descartes, Vol. II*, trans. John Cottingham, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 24.

has something to do my own awareness and its relationship between my inner awareness to something that exists outside the individual's mind. Truth seems to have something to do, not with what other speakers permit me to say but with how things are in the external world.[6] I know what the color red is like. Of course I have to communicate that to other people, but no matter what "word" one tells me to use, I still "know" what red is like to me. How can I ignore this form of introspective knowledge? I may not have the "concept" of a Cardinal (I may not even have the concept of a bird), but I know the red "object" that just flew past me because something from the external world was received, in the form of a sensory impression, by my senses which conveyed that awareness (intuitions without concepts may be blind, as Immanuel Kant tells us, but still, I am aware of something and it is not a word). What I know is the content of my own ideas and this content, which is in my mind, must be "something"—something that is more than just a word.

The above view captures what we might call a common sense view of language. Words are seen to represent real things. But this common sense view also underlies the epistemological skepticism that follows from our suspicion that ideas (or words) may not represent real things at all. But before we move to an analysis of language we need to look more closely at ideas. Here we see the view that the "idea" matters more than the word. John Locke, a critic of Cartesian innate ideas, nevertheless buys into the Cartesian revolution that affected classical epistemology.

[6] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Third Edition, trans. G.E.M. Anscome (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1953), 2e. Wittgenstein is referring to Augustine's *Confessions* (I. 8) in which Augustine speaks of words as bringing to mind objects. Wittgenstein says of this view of language: "These words, it seems to me, give us a particular picture of the essence of human language. It is this: the individual words in language name objects—sentences are combinations of such names.—In this picture of language we find the roots of the following idea: Every word has a meaning. This meaning is correlated with the word. It is the object for which the word stands. Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word. If you describe the learning of language in this way you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like "table", "chair", "bread", and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties; and of the remaining kinds of word as something that will take care of itself."

The attempt to reflect on the contents of our conscious minds and draw true conclusions about the external world is continued by Locke. While apologizing for his frequent use of the term idea, Locke offers his readers a definition: The term idea, Locke explains, is a word that "serves best to stand for whatsoever is the *object* of the understanding when a man thinks."[7] Conceived in this manner, words stand for mental things which in turn stand for, one might hope, external Reality.[8] But when we converse with ourselves we do so in a pre-existing language. Descartes' attempt to render himself better known to himself, a project which Locke continues, in spite of his attempt to ascertain the limits of the human understanding through simple empirical investigation of the matters of fact, seems to overlook the role language plays in our understanding of these internal "ideas." And more importantly, and Locke failed to see this, what we receive through the senses does not justify, by itself, what we think of as knowledge.

Even before Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism tried to resolve the problems inherent in rationalism and empiricism, we see the beginnings of a new brand of skepticism that calls into question the supposed abilities of our ideas to represent, correctly, an external reality.[9]

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[7] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Dover Publications, 1959), 32.

[8] Rorty capitalizes the words reality and truth to signify their importance, as concepts, within the tradition of Western epistemology. I will do so, at times, when using these words as Rorty uses them. Other philosophers, such as John McDowell, place the word reality in quotation marks to signify that what we are currently talking about is what our linguistic community accepts as a justified statement about how things are. The underlying issue concerns whether or not justification is ever in touch with how things are independent of what our peers allow us to say. It is for this reason that we the scare quotes around the word "reality." I will also follow McDowell's example and use quotation marks to indicate my use of the word reality in this sense as well.

[9] See John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," in *Rorty and His Critics*, ed. Robert Brandom (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). McDowell observes that Rorty wants to abandon both the language of objectivity and the idea of answerability to the world. He also notes that Rorty tends to speak of modern epistemology as giving us one more version of the Platonic distinction between appearance and reality. And as part of his solution Rorty adopts, from contemporary philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, methods for coping that are congenial to his diagnosis of the problems. McDowell does not think that what we experience in modern epistemology is the result of mistakes that are "timeless" in the history of philosophy. It is one thing, McDowell argues, to abandon the language of objectivity and the idea of getting things right, and another to raise the question in such a way that concerns about contingency never come to the fore. For McDowell, truth as disquotability raises questions concerning "to whom?" we are answerable, that is, it is a mode of justifiedness that concentrates on beliefs

Cartesian skepticism, in this particular understanding of it, is not concerned, primarily, with the difference between knowledge and opinion and the need for a criterion capable of halting regress of justification.[10] Descartes' criterion, the thinker qua self-conscious, emerges in the wake of a skepticism that begins with doubts about the very existence of the external world. So, in the "natural" progress of the narrative, when the analysis of propositions replaces the analysis of ideas, the same "representational realist" concerns we had about ideas are transferred to words. But in the narrative I am constructing, our concerns about language do not develop until later.[11]

At this point in the story, we are reflecting on how a "gap" develops, in Descartes, between our minds and the external world (and such reflection is not meant to justify skepticism

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and social practices. Normative inquiry raises questions not just about "to whom?" but "in light of what?" Here he stresses the importance of an inquiry that retains an emphasis on world-directedness without accepting, at face-value, the Cartesian worries about the vanishing world. McDowell sees Plato and Kant as allies in the attempt to move beyond the problem of the vanishing world, not as theorists who are in a long line of "immature" thinkers who need be right with respect to how things really are. So, the question concerns how much of the tradition we should abandon and what, if anything, we should preserve in the language of objectivity. Are we making the same mistakes Plato made or are contemporary antifoundationalists missing something important still contained in the idea of world-directedness?

[10] Michael Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," in *Richard Rorty*, eds. Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 63.

[11] Rorty's use of the idea of final vocabularies relies heavily on his nature/reason duality. This division figures into the cause/justification divide—we speak but the world does not. As such, the world does not justify our beliefs, we do this through the descriptions we offer. But even though we justify through the descriptions we choose, the world never stands in a justificatory relationship to our beliefs. This is an important distinction for Rorty that is responsible for the charges of relativism that are frequently leveled against him. Also, this emphasis on language, as Richard Bernstein notes, removes experience from our analysis of knowledge and forces our attention towards descriptions (linguistified reason). As Donald Davidson explains, "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except for another belief." See, Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and knowledge," reprinted in Ernest LePore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 310. This is the quasi-Berkelean idea referenced by Frank Verges in his critique of what he calls linguistic idealism. Verges understands Rorty's linguistic redescription as an updated version of the radical empiricist critique of the theory of ideas. If we think of Berkeley's *esse est percipi* we see the importance of perception (receptivity) for human ideas. Ultimately we do not know if there is an objective reality "out there," but we do know that we are aware of our ideas. Since nothing can be more like an idea than an idea, the world becomes (if we are to limit our statements to what we can say for certain—which is the testimony of introspection that yields awareness of our own ideas) an idea in our minds. Verges thinks Rorty's linguistic approach in particular and postmodernism in general offer a picture of knowledge that is analogous to Berkeley's. Here we see an approach to knowledge that focuses too much on language and concepts (as Berkeley did with perception and ideas). In place of the notion that "nothing can be like an idea but another than an idea," we see the postmodern linguistic slogan that proclaims the opacity of the text: nothing can be like a signifier (or text or word) but another signifier. See Frank Verges, "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," *Philosophy* vol. 67, no. 261 (July 1992), 388.

in either case, that is, with respect to either ideas or words). If we begin to think that there is a gap between ourselves and external Reality, a "natural" conclusion to draw given the trajectory of the debate, the fear is that we will not be able to determine anything about the fundamental facts outside of ourselves through an analysis of "ideas" in the a priori style of Descartes. But neither will we be able to answer the Cartesian skeptic through empirical analysis alone. Normative questions concerning the limits of the human understanding cannot be settled though empirical questions about what the human mind is capable of knowing (as Locke supposed). Whatever is going on inside the "mind," it must be communicated. In short, we think and speak our thoughts in a language; however, the change from an analysis based on ideas to one rooted in language still contains some of the same problems we see extant in classical epistemology.

Languages, "natural" ones such as French, Latin, German, and English are created—as are the "artificial" ones we use in mathematics and computer programming. Since words and symbols receive their meanings from the ways in which the surrounding community uses them, we may begin to wonder what assurances we have that, when we speak, we speak of the external world, of Reality itself, rather than just the goings on in our own minds. Classical epistemology raises doubts about our knowledge of the relationship between idea and thing. But the same sort of worry persists when we think of language as "representing" something.

The Prison-House of Language

The fear is that, once we begin to think of conceptual knowledge as propositional knowledge, once we introduce doubts about whether our words and sentences actually represent or correspond to how things are in the external world, we begin to envisage the possibility that

language itself may be playing the role that Plato's Cave did for the prisoners locked inside. In Plato's allegory, we are able to see the difference between the shadows on the wall of the cave and the real objects being carried behind on a parapet. But when we speak, the fear is that our words may not even be like the shadows. At least the flickering images on the wall of the cave were related to real objects. If the mind is like a cave, what we want are some assurances that we can see outside this cave to determine if what is inside bears any resemblance to a Reality that is external to it. In raising such doubts, if in fact there is no way out of the cave, the epistemological skeptic introduces the thought that we may not be able to "climb outside our own minds" and determine whether or not our words (like the ideas in Cartesian-Lockean epistemology) make any contact with Reality at all.[12]

Richard Rorty, whose linguistic understanding of pragmatism frames the discourse within the present dissertation, would like to side-step this whole skeptical business and become comfortable with the idea that it is our inherited social practices (and linguistic performances) that constitute the basis for warranted assertions concerning Truth (what he calls vocabularies) and that these do not make (or need not be shown to make) contact with Reality.[13] But the previous statement needs some explication. There is, as we can see, a difference between saying things such as our statements "do not make," and our statements "need not be shown to make" contact with Reality. I am a participant in the debate when I make a statement of the first sort; I am attempting to side-step—or taking an outsider's perspective—when I make a statement of the second sort. This is an old problem in philosophy—one that touches on knowledge, the self-

[12] John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," 119.
[13] This also blurs the line between truth and justification since, for Rorty, justification takes place within the logical space of reasons. The world has a causal relationship to our beliefs, but beliefs are not justified by states of affairs in the external world.

referential inconsistency, and the attempt to account for oneself in one's critique of inherited traditions—, but it persists in the present discussion: How does one criticize a tradition of which one is a part? In particular, we are trying to criticize a certain understanding of what truth should be like, but we might already be operating with an understanding that our tradition alone has already instilled in us. The problem is that, once a question is raised in a certain manner, subsequent attempts to talk about it get framed by the terms of the discussion already underway. Once we begin to think about the problem of the external world, we may have already bought into the argument in ways that are disastrous for our attempt to side-step the issue. In this view, both the skeptic and the true believer may be fighting the wrong enemy. As with overproduction in a market-based economy, where the production of more commodities, to counter falling prices, leads to even lower prices and ultimately to economic recessions, the "answers" to skepticism might make the problem worse. A theorist who wishes to get off this Ferris wheel expresses a desire to which we might be sympathetic. But if her solution advocates for side-stepping the issue concerning nonhuman grounds for justification, she may also be in the same position as the business person who increases production to off-set waning demand; she may be producing more of the problematic "old" answers—analogous in the present argument to commodities—that actually make the problem worse. The German word *Fragestellung* captures this idea as does the old saying, "you can't unring a bell." Once we begin thinking in these terms, it prevents us from seeing alternatives to our present predicament.

But the image of "climbing outside our minds" captures, with analogy, a form of skepticism associated with what John McDowell calls epistemology pursed in the "Cartesian and British-empiricist style." McDowell and Rorty agree that skepticism of this sort, the image of

climbing outside the mind, presupposes a cure to the problem that is both external and illusory. However, while agreeing about the illusory nature of one particular type of perspective thought to answer (potentially) the skeptic, they disagree about whether we should try to answer the skeptic in the first place. In fact, Rorty wonders how "refuting the skeptic" became a goal to begin with:

> To understand why the seventeenth century became intrigued with the relation between theory and evidence, we need to ask why Descartes's fantasies captured Europe's imagination. As Quine says: "Epistemologists dreamed of a first philosophy, firmer than science and serving to justify our knowledge of the external world." But why did everybody suddenly start dreaming the same dream? Why did the theory of knowledge become something more than the languid academic exercise of composing a reply to Sextus Empiricus?[14]

Rorty's determination to side-step or dissolve the problem of skepticism differs from McDowell's program, which can be characterized as an attempt to solve the skeptical problem, rather than side-step, through a reconstruction of empiricism.[15] For McDowell, the Rortyean idea that justification and truth are not different in any interesting way is absurd. In order to answer the skeptic, McDowell thinks we need to say more about how the external world impinges rationally on our beliefs (in more than merely causal relations).

Rorty does not want to answer the skeptic, but his attitude towards skepticism is more complex than it might seem at first glance. Specifically, while positioning himself as a "therapeutic" philosopher, he avoids taking a positon (or does his best to avoid doing so) with

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[14] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1979), 223.

[15] See Stephen Leach, "Pyrrhonian Skepticism and the Mirror of Nature," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* vol. 27, no. 4 (2013), 390. Rorty makes use of insights from both Thomas Kuhn and Donald Davidson and their arguments concerning paradigms. Critics of Rorty think his conclusions about the limits of knowledge, stemming from insights gleaned from debates about the dualism of scheme and content, are too extreme. They think that knowledge of a mind independent world is still possible even after we acknowledge the importance of the conceptual scheme and the role it plays in our interpretation of "facts." Stephan Leach suggests Rorty's position is best understood in the tradition of Pyrrhonian skepticism. Rather than worrying about "facts," we dissolve problems (or suspend judgment concerning "realty").

respect to the representational realist's claims concerning correspondence. More specifically, the claim Rorty advances is that justification rests in the surrounding the community—what your peers allow you to say. The empiricist notion is that justification has something to do with states of affairs in the external world. Moreover, it seems that the surrounding community can be wrong, so if justification is conformity to the currently accepted linguistic practices, we are giving up on a notion of Truth that seems important (even when we are thinking about persuading, rationally, others). Rorty's therapeutic approach allows him to take a positon, with respect to the claims of the epistemological skeptic, that resembles the Pyrrhonean skeptic's claim of metaphysical non-commitment with respect to non-evident entities. This is the move he makes with respect to talk about Reality and the concerns epistemologists have about climbing outside of the mind. However, when it comes to the political liberalism that he prefers, Rorty does not advocate for a position of metaphysical non-commitment. Borrowing from Judith Shklar, Rorty maintains that "cruelty is the worst thing we do."[16] Here, Rorty represents the proscription against cruelty as a belief that needs no further justification.

To be sure, he does not think our moral commitments can be grounded, but he is not dissolving problems concerning grounds in the same way he dissolves representational realist claims concerning justification. Here Rorty solves problems, in the view I offer of his ironism, by reducing them to linguistic practices. In brief, I find that Rorty gives two different answers to the two different types of metaphysicians: To the epistemological skeptic he offers not to solve but to dissolve the skeptical problem; however, to the liberal metaphysician, the one who thinks our moral and political beliefs require grounds that are more solid than the "conversational"

[16] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), xv.

grounds his linguistic pragmatism argues are sufficient (or the only ones that could possibly exist), Rorty proposes to solve problems through a redescriptive program in which grounds are seen as the beliefs we currently hold. This makes him a relativist, rather than a skeptic, with respect to justification. Since these beliefs are accessed (and communicated) linguistically, beliefs and concepts become the words we use. The implications of this view, which I mention above, are that if we change the word, we can change "reality."

The upshot of this is that Rorty takes a skeptical stance with respect to epistemology in general; however, when it comes to the other brand of skepticism, philosophy-as-epistemology from Descartes to Kant, his stance is not that of a skeptic. But, since the world does not justify, Rorty's antirepresentationalism—which Charles Taylor argues is still stuck within the Cartesian representationalist construct it seeks to move beyond—is free to create new therapeutic pictures of our lives together in society free from the "friction" imposed by older notions concerning Truth as correspondence to the world.[17] Rorty is not an epistemological skeptic, but he is a skeptic with respect to epistemology.[18] What this means, in Rorty's view, is that justification is linguistic, and any attempt to make justification, to make ourselves, right with respect to how things are is a metaphysician's ploy to make human beings answerable to the world rather than to each other. This aspect of Rorty's thought has brought charges of both relativism and Linguistic Idealism. But Rorty thinks both charges are couched in the vocabulary of objectivity that he rejects. In saying this, Rorty rejects the Prison-House metaphor arguing that it too is a product of the very tradition he seeks to critique. But McDowell thinks that what

[17] Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," in *Richard Rorty*, eds. Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 158-180.
[18] See Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," 61-80.

> gives the seeming problems of mainstream modern epistemology their seeming urgency is not the sheer idea that inquiry is answerable to the world. The culprit, rather, is a frame of mind in which the world to which we want to conceive our thinking as answerable threatens to withdraw out of reach of anything we can think of as our means of access to it. A gap threatens to open between us and what we should like to conceive ourselves as knowing about, and it then seems to be a task for philosophy to show us ways to bridge the gulf. It is this threat of inaccessibility on the part of the world that we need to dislodge, in order to unmask as illusory the seeming compulsoriness of mainstream epistemology. And the threat of inaccessibility is not part of the very idea of the world as something other than ourselves to which our investigative activities are answerable.[19]

McDowell wants to retain some connection between mind and world. The idea that we need to focus on social practices and linguistic performances, rather than about the world we are trying to describe (or thought that we were describing), is a suggestion he thinks goes too far—one that borders not on philosophical therapy but rather on coherentism (Linguistic Idealism).

For McDowell, our statements should be answerable, in some degree, to the world. But Rorty's linguistic pragmatism cannot allow for such a move. Although they both agree that we should not think of knowledge in terms of climbing outside our minds to obtain a "true" perspective, McDowell thinks that if we cannot prevent a gap from opening up between language and world (a gap that he thinks philosophers such as Rorty cause to widen further with their antirepresentationalist views), then we will be forever mired in the Prison-House of Language.[20] Rorty, however, wants none of this. His humanism requires us to be answerable only to ourselves. The whole notion of the *mundus absconditus* (the vanishing world) made possible the vocabulary of objectivity (what he calls the tradition of philosophy-as-epistemology from

[19] John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," 110.
[20] See Patricia Hanna and Bernard Harrison, *Word and World: Practice and the Foundations of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 17. This is the title of Frederic Jameson's book and it is a phrase that he attributes to Friedrich Nietzsche. Hanna and Harrison use a version of this phrase (prison-house skepticism) to describe the problem McDowell understands to issue from the linguistic turn in general and coherentism specifically.

Descartes to Kant), is a fear that dissipates, he claims, with a "proper" understanding of language. But Rorty's understanding of this does not dispense with the dichotomy of nature/reason (or cause/justification). It is essential that justification remain within the space of reasons and not within the space of nature (the external world that was so important to classical empiricist epistemology).

Mitigated Skepticism

I use the word "proper" in the paragraph above, but Rorty would not. However, my argument in this dissertation is that this is exactly what he does say about language. Still, it might be difficult for a reader to see, because, Rorty's ironism permits him to take a position with respect to the two types of skepticism I argue that he utilizes. The resulting view, according to Michael Williams, resembles the same biperspectival "epistemological outlook" we see in David Hume.[21] In short, Rorty distinguishes between the private ironist and the public liberal; whereas Hume's "mitigated skepticism" distinguishes between intellectual life in the study and the common life lived in the social world. Hume writes:

> There is an inconvenience which attends all abstruse reasoning, that it may silence, without convincing an antagonist, and requires the same intense study to make us sensible of its force, that was at first requisite for its invention. When we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life, its conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning; and 'tis difficult for us to retain even that conviction, which we had attain'd with difficulty.[22]

[21] Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," 70.
[22] David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Classics), 507.

Hume thinks that there is no way to answer the skeptic once we begin to offer candidates for possible grounds for our knowledge (and doubt the testimony of our senses as Descartes did). However, in our daily lives, these sorts of doubts seem specious. We do not need to answer the epistemological skeptic and close the gap between Mind (or Language) and World in order to help our neighbor or boil an egg.

But Hume operates with a concept of human nature that is missing in Rorty. Hume writes:

> It seems a happiness in the present theory, that it enters not into that vulgar dispute concerning the degrees of benevolence or self-love, which prevail in human nature; a dispute which is never likely to have any issue, both because men, who have taken part, are not easily convinced, and because the phenomena, which can be produced on either side, are so dispersed, so uncertain, and subject to so many interpretations, that it is scarcely possible accurately to compare them, or draw from them any determinate inference or conclusion. It is sufficient for our present purpose, if it be allowed, what surely, without the greatest absurdity cannot be disputed, that there is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom; some spark of friendship for human kind; some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and serpent.[23]

But the linguistic pragmatism Rorty offers understands the idea of a human nature to be of a piece with the same metaphysical ideas that underlie the epistemic concerns evinced in McDowell's notion of answerability to the world (in spite of Rorty's assertion concerning cruelty, which seems to privilege the ability of a human being to feel pain). McDowell, of course, disagrees with Rorty's view of human nature and the idea that such talk is always metaphysical in the worst sense of the word. McDowell argues that it is "second nature," rather than a human nature, that is implicated in answerability. Rorty's attempt to side-step all forms of

[23] David Hume, *Enquires: Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.S. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 271.

grounding and answerability make it, in McDowell's view, a mystery how we can have beliefs with conceptual content at all.[24]

But Rorty is careful to avoid terms that seem to make us answerable to anything other than each other. And his treatment of epistemological skepticism in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* contains many cautionary notes along these lines. But with *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he begins to focus on irony and the ways in which we can proceed, free from metaphysics, as we deal with moral and political matters in the liberal, democratic society he prefers. This is part of Rorty's therapeutic approach. But here he does not side-step philosophical problems or take a position of metaphysical noncommitment as would the Pyrrhonean skeptic. When it comes to our ordinary everyday claims about science and ethics, Rorty is an active participant although he remains a skeptic about epistemology.[25] In other words, Rorty takes a position of metaphysical noncommitment with respect to referential realist claims concerning the extramental, extralinguistic world, but when talking about scientific and political knowledge claims, he argues that what we are talking about are really nothing more than social practices and "linguistic performances." He does acknowledge that science shows us that the only things that exist are atoms and the void, but, at the same time, he denies thinking that Charles Darwin (or anybody) actually describes "reality" better than anybody else.[26]

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[24] John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1996), 87.

[25] We might think of the difference here as the one that exists between the Pyrrhonean and the Academic skeptic. See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, bk 1, no. 220-35, in Benson Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. Benson Mates (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 261. Subsequent references are cited as OP, followed by book and marginal number. Rorty wants to take no position on issues such as Cartesian minds and the Truth in the representational realist's sense. But with respect to moral and political activity, he does not apply the same form of skepticism. Our practices and linguistic performances serve as the basis for our choices and these do not need grounds. But in saying that cruelty is the worst thing we do, he seems to actually make a claim about the material world rather than taking a position of metaphysical non-commitment. Rorty is not a Global Skeptic, but, at times, he does seem like a theorist Sextus might call an Academic skeptic.

[26] *TP*, 152.

The key to understanding Rorty's distinction lies in understanding the ways in which he employs the implications that the Linguistic Turn has for our understanding of knowledge. These changes involve the shift from an analysis based on conceptual knowledge to an analysis rooted in propositional knowledge. What I really suspect is that philosophers have made a mistake in their move from concepts to language. However, this is a rather large issue that I think must remain on the periphery in the present dissertation. We have already seen the failed attempts by analytical philosophers to distinguish, metaphysically, between the proper spheres for a priori and a posteriori investigations. Rorty's holistic approach comes in the wake of this collapse within analytical philosophy. But both the analytical and continental traditions have embraced the re-thinking of substance metaphysics linguistically. And yet Rorty cautions:

> "Analytic" philosophy is one more variant of Kantian philosophy, a variant marked principally by thinking of representation as linguistic rather than mental, and of philosophy of language rather than "transcendental critique," or psychology, as the discipline which exhibits the "foundations of knowledge." This emphasis on language…does not essentially change the Cartesian-Kantian problematic, and thus does not really give philosophy a new self-image. For analytic philosophy is still committed to the construction of a permanent, neutral framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture."[27]

In destroying the distinction between analytic and synthetic propositions, Rorty (following Quine and Davidson) undermines the Kantian foundations of "analytic" philosophy. He turns the presuppositions of the linguistic analysis back on itself. But, since Rorty's approach also relies heavily on the use of "vocabularies" and "descriptions," the same critique he levels against analytical philosophy could also be made about his neo-pragmatism. Rorty wants to show how we can redescribe the mental linguistically; but this involves shifting one's analysis from conceptual knowledge to propositional. However, in the manner in which Rorty proposes to do

[27] *PMN*, 8.

this, his linguistic treatment of knowledge, he hopes, will enable us to avoid falling back into correspondence in the ways in which he thinks analytical philosophers did. So, to lay my cards on the table, I harbor reservations about how far we should go in re-thinking (or replacing) conceptual knowledge with propositional. And while Rorty does too, and while reductionist thinking is at odds with the therapeutic approach he offers, I do think that Rorty tries to do too much with the shift to propositional knowledge.[28] It may even be that some of what he says, in the way of a critique of analytical philosophy's use of linguistic analysis, also applies to his linguistic pragmatism. Rorty has, in other places, noted many similarities between John Dewey and Martin Heidegger. But his version of pragmatism eschews the emphasis on experience, so important in Dewey and the idea of background knowledge and being-in-the-world that we find in Heidegger.[29] The most convenient place to attack this distinction between conceptual and propositional, I think, is where it is potentially at its weakest point: the cause/justification distinction. Specifically, if a linguistic approach is substituting out rather than simply redescribing, then it substitutes out, in a subtle way, the common sense view that our words are

[28] This is especially the case when Rorty seems to suggest that awareness of contingency somehow gives us control enough over linguistic behavior to effect "real" changes in our social world based exclusively on linguistic changes. When we consider the cause/justification as it is employed by Rorty, we see that the world causes us to have beliefs, but it does not justify those beliefs. When we speak in moral terms about what we see in the world around us, we can effect changes in the behavior of our fellows, even though we do not argue that the world itself makes us correct to speak in one way or the other. We might wonder here what would cause us to change our descriptions since the latter seem to have normative content, but the world (the world's impressions on our senses) does not contain normative validity in itself. With our descriptions, we move from the understanding we have to a state affairs in the external world. And we do not think of this process as one that involves accurate description of reality but rather of changing appearances so that these begin to strike us as better. But it seems to me that we are still dealing with normative concepts. Even if moral rightness is not received through the senses, we still choose to apply a description to what we see. I am not suggesting that we need some contemporary version of the Cartesian pineal gland to explains how thoughts become actions (and the suggestion the Rorty's theory requires animal spirts would be rather gratuitous). Still, there does seem to be a problem and it seems to be connected to that space where causes become justifications. If they are different, and we choose new descriptions from the space of reasons, are we already operating with normative concepts that we already believe to be connected in some sense to the external world?

[29] Richard Rorty, "Overcoming the Tradition: Heidegger and Dewey," in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1982), 37-54.

about the external world while seeming to raise no such concerns when the issue turns to our public lives together. Here, intuitions cause but they do not justify.

But rather than talking about experience, as classical pragmatists had done, Rorty focuses, consciously, on the idea that we are constructing descriptions, leaving one to wonder if descriptions (or concepts) are answerable to the world about which we are attempting to speak. In making justification a social phenomenon, Rorty argues that truth is not correspondence to a nonhuman standard, but rather it is what our peers will allow us to get away with saying. One is tempted to take a page from Samuel Johnson, kicking the proverbial rock and saying, "I refute Rorty thus." But this would be a misunderstanding. Still, if descriptions created the metaphysical ideas he wants to dissolve, why does this not apply to our social lives as well? If cruelty is the worst we do, then why can we not apply everything he says about Cartesian epistemological skepticism to statements about liberalism and to our social lives which, after all, are constituted materially? Is the ability of a human being to experience pain functioning as a kind of given in Rorty?[30]

The Methodology Employed in this Dissertation

My aim is to retrace the major steps Rorty takes as he makes a case for a view of social change as linguistic redescription. This will require us to examine what Rorty means by "doing

[30] These questions presuppose a great deal. Some might even say that they beg the question against Rorty, but I am not sure. Rorty's knowledge of analytical philosophy is vast. Anyone who attempts to play the analytical game with Rorty may be embarking on a fool's errand. But still, he seems to offer both a redescriptive and a reductionist approach to knowledge claims—to both dissolve and solve problems concerning appearance and reality, while arguing that it is not him but the metaphysician that has the desire to bridge the gap between Mind (or Language) and World. Rorty's use of language (vocabularies for solving problems) seems to be the key to this problem. How do we engage in the moral discourse in our society without grounding our principles in repudiated knowledge of reality and also without falling into an extreme form of relativism—the result of a linguistic theory that removes world-directed friction from one's interpretations?

metaphysics." Usually it involves making a statement that is thought to correspond to "how things really are." However, as Rorty analyzes the concept of justification, it becomes clear that any statement believed to correspond to a nonhuman standard, that is, any belief pertaining to a relationship between humans to some nonhuman standard (as opposed to a relationship between humans to other humans within a community), is a form of metaphysics or correspondence to the "real." His analysis of the Cartesian-Lockean construct of the "mind" in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is illustrative of such a critique. Here correspondence is represented as correspondence to an essence. Through an analysis that keeps Wilfrid Sellars's Myth of the Given in view, Rorty shows how the Cartesian mind can be re-imagined both materially and linguistically. Such re-thinking need not be reductionist to have the desired therapeutic effect by showing us how we can stop talking about "minds" and transcendental realms of Being.

But in good pragmatist manner, Rorty recognizes that what we do in practice is important. Hence, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he shows how we can proceed in society without attempting to ground our moral or political principles in justificatory structures thought to be timeless or in the nature of things. At the theoretical level, his view of Truth remains the same in both works. But in the latter work his idea of linguistic redescription, which is already operative, begins to reveal tension between his theoretical commitments and his embrace of liberal political values as he attempts to show how we can proceed in society without doing metaphysics.

Rorty's idea of final vocabularies, an idea that grows out the historicism we see in Thomas Kuhn and Donald Davidson, invites the question: Are there any descriptions that are better in the sense that the world not only causes us to hold beliefs, but actually justifies us in

holding one belief over another? Rorty answers in the negative: The world never stands in a Rational, justificatory role to any our beliefs. Moreover, the attempt to spell-out what one means by "better" takes us back to the other side of the dualism that Rorty erects between causes and justifications. But here we might wonder, since better refers to the settled convictions of the community and not to how things are in the world (in the sense that the world impinges rationally on my belief), what does the word better mean when we are talking about what our fellows allow us say? Does Rorty's positon, in spite of his intent to move beyond these categories, still retain elements of voluntarism and emotivism left-over from the positivist tradition that, in the final analysis, becomes another form of relativism?[31]

In my treatment of this issue, I will show that experience of the world is indeed involved in our justifications. The cause/justification distinction is an integral part of Rorty's idea of final vocabularies. And since this distinction is already operative in the Hegelian critique of empiricism, it becomes, as we move from conceptual to propositional knowledge, an integral part of what we now think of as the Linguistic Turn. So, while this dissertation will be a step in the direction of a critique of the cause/justification distinction, it still keeps sight of the problems associated with the Given and the Naturalistic Fallacy.

These cautionary stipulations are consistent with those present in John McDowell's critique of Rorty and his defense of empiricism. In order to prosecute my thesis, I will draw on

[31] See Hillary Putman, *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990), *ix*. Putnam notes, "Although my view has points of agreement with some of the views Richard Rorty has defended, I do not share his skepticism about the very existence of a substantial notion of truth. In the Kant Lectures that constitute Chapter 1 of this volume, I try to explain not only how the metaphysical realist perspective has broken down in science itself, but also how Rortian relativism cum pragmatism fails as an alternative to metaphysical realism. Rorty's present "position" is not so much a position as the illusion or mirage of a position; in this respect it resembles solipsism, which looks like a possible (if unbelievable) position from a distance, but which disappears into thin air when closely examined, Indeed, Rorty's view is just solipsism with a 'we' instead of an 'I.'

the work of McDowell, Richard Bernstein, Michael Williams, Thomas McCarthy and John Searle. I will argue that Rorty's critique of epistemological skepticism is implicated in his ironism in ways that weaken his idea of linguistic redescription. Rorty wants to move beyond the traditional *Fragestellung* we philosophers have inherited. He understands the imperative to move beyond the tradition of metaphysics as one that requires us to move also beyond debates about realism/antirealism as well as relativism—issues that have forced theorists in the past to seek indubitable grounds thought to be transcendent or in the nature of things. As Rorty understands it, these "grounds" are of a piece with Plato's Form of the Good. Similarly, the desire to make human beings answerable to the world is of a piece with the desire, historically, to make us answerable to God. So "doing metaphysics" for Rorty is an activity in which a theorist engages when she is not comfortable with the idea that we are answerable only to each other. And indeed, some form of this is a proscription against metaphysical thinking embraced by the theorists I mention above. However, Rorty's view, I will argue, presents an extreme form of linguistic historicism that understands knowledge and social change as linguistic phenomena rooted in our contingent, social practices. And, although Rorty would chafe at the suggestion that his view is reductionist in the metaphysician's sense of making a statement that is thought to be justified by how things are in the world rather than in what our fellows allow us to say, I think this is what he does as he applies his therapeutic approach to social practices. This dissertation will reveal that while I share Rorty's humanist concerns, if we actually embrace irony in the manner he suggests, it will lead to what I think is an unacceptable form of relativism that is built on a linguistic pragmatism that severs all Rational connections between mind and world.

As previously mentioned, the theorists above are in agreement, as am I, with much that Rorty has to say about the desirability of our liberal political values. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* helps to make a case for this. But the book also argues that no synthesis between the private and public spheres is possible. To understand this line that Rorty draws, we need to look at his treatment of both epistemological skepticism and the skepticism concerning epistemology. So, this dissertation will be a step in two directions at once: Although Rorty offers a rigorous critique of the metaphysical tradition he also retains a belief in the emancipatory potential of human beings. But this belief is not grounded in a theory of Reason, nor is it supported by statements concerning the way things really are. Like the liberal metaphysicians he criticizes, Rorty insists that we can focus on human emancipation but, unlike the liberal theorist, we can do so without answering questions concerning what is actually right in the sense that something universal or rational recommends my choice to favor being less cruel to my fellows. But since Rorty's work is animated by his critique of correspondence metaphysics (and moral realism), it will be necessary to look at the traditions (both North American and European) that have influenced his thought.

In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty offers a critique of the Cartesian-Lockean construct of the mind. This critique offers a way to re-think Descartes' "discovery" of consciousness linguistically, rather than thinking of conscious awareness as a ground for knowledge—something that tells us, intuitively, that some of our ideas do correspond to how things really are. At times Rorty analyzes representation in terms of colors and "raw feels" such as pains. But at other times he thinks of representation as any belief in an objective, real world. He does not say that we humans cannot engage in conscious introspection, but the testimony of

introspection is no longer seen as representing anything "real." This is due to the effects of the cause/justification distinction and the shift from an analysis of concepts to one based on an antirepresentationalist analysis of propositions—the assumption being that signifiers and signifieds represent other words and not things. So we can engage in conscious introspection, but we will not find Truth. McDowell sees this as a form of coherentism (Linguistic Idealism) that makes the empirical content of our beliefs mysterious and, by removing answerability, results in frictionless spinning. Although Rorty deconstructs the Cartesian-Lockean construct of the mind, in the view of McDowell and John Searle, effectively, he does so at great cost. There are, as these theorists explain, many reasons to advocate for a belief in the world-directedness of thought (as McDowell does) or in some form of external realism (as we see in Searle).

Although Rorty repudiates the empiricist presuppositions associated with the positivism of the Vienna Circle (and makes avoiding correspondence the key to freeing-up human beings to redescribe their social world in a more edifying manner), his theory of linguistic redescription retains the deflationary potency of the earlier radical empiricists in the sense that what we thought we were speaking about (the mind-independent constructs important for foundationalists), come to be seen as either (1) physical brain states or (2) linguistic place-holders—constructs thought to be real but only because, as Rorty understands the issue (using a celebrated phrase from Wittgenstein), our language has gone on "holiday."[32] "Skepticism" in this regard is an important issue in the present dissertation and Rorty writes as if both epistemological skepticism as well as the belief in the world-directedness of statements can be redescribed. His program, I will argue, is too quick to run together the vocabulary of objectivity

[32] Wittgenstein, 19e.

with the idea of answerability to something more than what other speakers will allow us to say. In short, we can redescribe Cartesian minds without making our theory answerable to how things are, but the same thing cannot be said, in my view, with respect to our preference for liberal political values (not without undermining our ability to stand resolutely for the values we prefer).

Rorty's linguistic analysis seems to retain this dimension of analytical philosophy (growing out of the analytical and positivist traditions that he inherits and exploits) that regards talk of "inner" feelings and "wills" to power as itself too Cartesian. This places Rorty's linguistic redescription in a curious relationship to the entities in the world about which we speak (and find meaningful owing to our ability to take-up care relationships to these entities in the world). There is a connection here between scientific and moral realism; as one might expect, Rorty's analysis of correspondence understands the latter in this same vein (mental phenomena are of a piece with essences and things in themselves thought to exist at the deepest level of the self). He does not, on a practical level, deny the existence of mental phenomena in the sense that human beings "talk" about being in such and such a state of "mind." But he borrows from Wilfrid Sellars a psychological nominalist position with respect to inner mental states or "raw feels."[33] This allows him to talk about feelings, fears, and psychoses without attributing to these "mental events" a status that is anything more than mere linguistic place-holders in a scientistic language-game.

Viewing language—rather than experience as earlier pragmatists did—as a tool for problem solving enables Rorty to treat the "how" of a belief without weighing in on questions concerning the personal meaning that individuals experience. In short, when we see

[33] See *PMN*, 188-209.

psychological nominalism working in tandem with Rorty's "epistemological behaviorism," we see a theoretical approach that treats linguistic acts in the same manner as earlier pragmatists had treated social action. In other words, not only is justification placed in the realm of the space of reasons—cutting it off from answerability to the world in McDowell's terms—, but mental phenomena such as beliefs, feelings, and conscious awareness become words that we used to signal a propensity to behave in such and such a fashion. What Rorty gives us, and it does appear at first glance to be concrete, is actually a theory of agency that is divorced from what McDowell analyzes as action that presupposes an agent's capacity for spontaneity as understood by Immanuel Kant.

For Rorty, authenticity and spontaneity talk lead us back into talk about our "glassy essence" in which an analysis that posits motives or "raw feels" begins to look like one that reveals some actually existing "thing" that our words are thought to represent—the awareness we have of our conscious thoughts, feelings, and intentions. There are, of course, good reasons to think that human receptivity becomes something for us in ways that it does not in nonhuman animals. Both human and nonhuman animals have, as far as we can tell, perceptual capacities, but the givenness of experience is not accompanied by the exact same conceptual capacities in both human and nonhuman animals. Something happens when human animals receive brute force impacts from nature that does not appear to happen when, for example, cows, geese, and rats receive the same sensory impacts from the surrounding world.[34] But if we maintain, as Rorty does, that an unbridgeable divide exists between causes and justifications, and, if we say

[34] John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 76-85. McDowell thinks we need to recapture the Aristotlian idea of a human being as a "rational animal." Our awareness of the Given and our intentional actions, which evince understanding of the world-directedness of thought, are part of what he analyzes under the heading of spontaneity. But in my view, this is also an attempt to talk about what Rorty would call "raw feels"—an enterprise that his "epistemological behaviorism" views with suspicion.

that our conceptual capacities seem to have "more" in them than nonhuman animals, are we attempting to establish a connection between mind and world that evinces a justificatory and not merely a causal connection?

As with Rorty's approach, mine too will not be exclusively North American or continental, but will rely on both traditions. I will also focus on the moral, social, and political implications of Rorty's critique of correspondence metaphysics. Central to Rorty's project is the claim that we can engage in social discourse about our shared moral and political lives without making any metaphysical statements about what is going on in reality. Rorty sees our reluctance to do this, without trying to ground our views in any sort of metaphysical theory, as the real legacy of Cartesian metaphysics—that we see truth as getting things right. This is what Rorty wants to avoid above all else. The idea that our statements need to correspond to something real, is seen by Rorty as the main problem. But whereas Pragmatists focus on experience, abjuring theories that attempt to ground knowledge in essences, Rorty focuses on language. Rather than worrying about "reality," Rorty wants us to focus only on how we represent the so-called real world to ourselves linguistically.[35] His hope is that we theorists can stop worrying about Truth and focus on how we actually live. But at the same time, he recognizes that the awareness of contingency evinced in the view above, is not a view we would want to be held by most people (nonintellectuals) in a liberal society. Still, by changing the ways in which we speak about the

[35] Rorty would say reality in itself, but I think that it is correct here to say simply reality. To the extent that talk of things in themselves is talk of essences, it is a form of discourse that both I and Rorty wish to avoid. If this was the only thing at issue presently, then I do not think that there would be much worth discussing; however, I do not think that Rorty is recommending that we avoid only talk of essences, souls, and moral absolutes. I think Rorty wants to change what we think or reality while, at the same time, advocating for the idea the "reality" is socially/linguistically constructed. This, in my opinion, introduces a form of relativism that borders on emotivism. It encourages us to talk about things that meaningful while, at the same time, stripping from us any ability we have to account, rationally, for why these things are (and should be) meaningful.

surrounding social world, we can change the things that strike us as problematic without worrying about whether our perspective is correct or not. Such knowledge is neither necessary nor possible. As Rorty puts it, thinking this way will allow us to focus on the "painted" image rather than thinking about truth as getting to the "real wall" behind the painted one.[36]

My Debt to Rorty

Many philosophers have weighed in on the issue of a non-foundationalist humanism, but the philosopher who stirred my thinking about this topic, more than any other, is the American philosopher Richard Rorty. Thus, my approach in this dissertation follows the path laid out by Rorty in two of his works: *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, and *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Rorty draws on both the analytical and continental traditions; however, his style, in these works, is best characterized as an outgrowth of the American, neo-Pragmatist school.

In the two works mentioned above, Rorty spells out a critique of foundationalist epistemology that ends with an approach he recommends to knowledge that emphasizes the importance of language. Rorty examines the knowledge claims raised by René Descartes and the tradition of metaphysics during what he calls the period from Descartes to Immanuel Kant. Rorty's primary contention is that this tradition understands truth as correspondence. Correspondence metaphysics utilizes (or privileges) a person's ability to examine the contents of his or her conscious mind, in the hope that such an examination will yield indubitable truths about the external world. Here we see that Rorty's critique of Cartesianism borrows from several traditions: (1) philosophy of mind in the analytical tradition, (2) continental philosophy,

[36] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 53-54.

hermeneutics, and insights borrowed from Sigmund Freud and the European psychological tradition, and (3) the Linguistic Turn (specifically the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein). Rorty combines (1) materialist theories of mind with (3) the Linguistic Turn to form an approach to knowledge he calls epistemological behaviorism (which for our purposes we can think of as neo-Pragmatism). He sees this, I suspect, as part of a new revolution in philosophy, a paradigm shift that allows us to reconceive philosophical problems linguistically; however, I think the direction he takes in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* reveals the assumptions contained in the former work to be therapeutic (as he intends) but also reductionist. What Rorty wants, however, is to think about the relationship between the self and society, not as a matter of finding anything real, i.e., a non-linguistic ground, but rather, as a linguistic issue, what he calls "redescription." In the latter, justification is a relationship between a person to other humans rather than to a nonhuman standard.

It is this latter move that I find questionable. Although Rorty utilizes a linguistic approach that bears some similarities to Wittgenstein's, Rorty's linguistic pragmatism has a metaphilosophical orientation that borders, at times, on what Charles Taylor calls non-realism.[37] Wittgenstein's approach to knowledge, in my interpretation of *Philosophical Investigations*, does not make these sorts of non-realist claims. To be sure, one can see how language causes us to think of words as actually existing things, but to say this is not to justify non-realism or even to ascribe normative components to a Wittgensteinian analysis.[38] His analysis of language can be

[37] Charles Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 258.
[38] See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 175-178. McDowell does not think Wittgenstein's quietism is a program that tells us what exists (or allows us to make statements about what does or does not exist), although some postmodernists seem to think that a linguistic analysis alone justifies a non-realist position. Searle will make a

seen, as can Rorty's, as a kind of philosophical therapy—an attempt to clear away the abstract, philosophical obscurities created by the language we speak, but this does not leave Wittgenstein (or the rest of us) with nothing left to do once we have cleared-up some of our conceptual mistakes. Rorty's "therapy," on the other hand, threatens to put philosophers out of job—just as the successful psychologist has nothing to do once she has cured the patient of his psychosis or convinced him, through redescription, to think of it as something else.

So I take Rorty's therapeutic claims with a grain of salt; or rather, I suspect that he is utilizing theory in more ways than he would like to admit. Instead, we might consider the possibility that Rorty is weighing in (surreptitiously) on the realist/antirealist debate. If we consider only his arguments in his middle period contained in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, then perhaps it is the case that Rorty is attempting to dissolve rather than solve problems associated with the vocabulary of objectivity. But read in conjunction with his private/public split, a development that, in his late period, gets spelled out in what Michael Williams calls a Humean turn in Rorty's thought, I think it will make more sense to see Rorty's claims as also containing a reductionist element.[39] Taylor makes a similar point, but he thinks Rorty still operates with a version of the representationalist view of knowledge.

Rorty's metaphilosophical interests shape his views in other areas. The diagnosis of present ills—epistemological skepticism and the vocabulary of objectivity—are abiding themes in most of his work. This diagnosis of our ills is read, by Rorty, back into Wittgenstein and

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similar criticism. Rorty is careful not to make statements about the non-existence of metaphysical entities, but the possibility that his ironism does just this is one of the issues his approach to language brings to the fore.

[39] Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," 69.

Plato, in an interpretation of objectivity that McDowell does not share.[40] But this is a view of Wittgenstein's work that many theorists today hold. In his introduction to *Hilary Putnam's Realism with a Human Face*, James Conant writes concerning present scholarship on Wittgenstein,

> For Kant, as we saw earlier, this propensity of the human mind to pose questions to itself that it is unable to answer is a natural and inevitable concomitant of its capacity to reason. Hence, human beings will always have a need for philosophy. A prevalent reading of Wittgenstein, recently popularized by Richard Rorty, attempts to distinguish him from Kant in this respect, viewing his work as undertaking to quench the human need for philosophy once and for all. On this reading, Wittgenstein is to be understood as teaching that all that there is left for (the good) philosophers to do is to clean up the metaphysical mistakes that other (bad) philosophers have committed. Putnam suggests at a number of points that such a reading of Wittgenstein depends upon a misunderstanding of the role of the metaphysically inclined interlocutory voice that intervenes on almost every page of Wittgenstein's later writings. Rorty appears to follow the widespread tendency to interpret the presence of this interlocutory voice as a literary device for dramatizing the metaphysical temptations of some misguided other—someone not yet privy to Wittgenstein's vision of how matters stand—a voice that is ultimately to be brought to silence. It is to be sharply distinguished from Wittgenstein's own voice: the voice in his text that rounds on, corrects, and censors the interlocutory voice.[41]

This is clearly the way in which Rorty employs Wittgenstein in his criticism of foundationalism. He wants to move us beyond a dead-end debate about relativism and realism; however, the idea the our new ground for knowledge must reside in the settled linguistic conventions of one's local, contingent community, constitutes an attack on the view that, when we speak, our words refer to something more than just other words, and this conviction—in spite of Rorty's intended

[40] See Richard Rorty, "Response to John McDowell," in *Rorty and His Critics*, 124. See also, McDowell, *Mind and World*, 27. McDowell says that for Wittgenstein, "there is no gap between the sort of thing that one can mean, or generally the sort the sort of thing one can think, and the sort of thing that can be the case." McDowell continues to explain, "since the world is everything that is the case [according to Wittgenstein], there is no gap between thought, as such, and the world."

[41] Hillary Putman, xli.

Wittgensteinian therapy—may not be a hold-over from the past that can be cleaned up with (what at times appears to be) a quasi-behavioristic analysis of speech acts.

The issue at present concerns just how willing we are to lend credence to convictions that strike us a plausible—to say that our realist intuitions are more than side-effects, the "collateral damage" inflicted upon individuals that have been socialized in a tradition that used to believe in transcendent realms. And in his work, Rorty has employed a large battery of arguments designed to defeat such insights stemming from personal introspection. But if a question strikes us as a good one, should we ignore it on the grounds that it may have been framed within an older paradigm that we (after we get clear on how language works) now reject? As McDowell explains, there are good questions that make sense to us not because of some deficiency on our part as interpreters, but because the world has the potential to impinge rationally on our beliefs. Rorty's attempt to change the subject and clear away obscurities seems less like answering a good question and more like a "deliberate plugging of the ears."[42] Consider, as an illustrative example, the following passage in Wittgenstein:

> If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word "pain' means—must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalize the *one* case so irresponsibly? Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case!—Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle.—Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing.—But suppose the word "beetle" had a use in these people's language?—If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language-game at all; not even as a *something:* for the box might even be empty.—No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is. That is to say: if

[42] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 151.

> we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant.[43]

In my view, we can read this as an argument for linguistic idealism—a therapeutic attempt to clean up the landscape and stop worrying about the existence of anything real or universal. As such, beetles, pains, and souls, can exist linguistically even though they do not exist in reality. This is the view I understand Rorty to hold. But he can also say that Wittgenstein's example shows us how matters *could* be redescribed. We can talk about how a word is used without making non-realist claims about the external world. But when Rorty applies linguistic redescription to society, that is, when, via ironism he claims that our final vocabularies—a person's most important moral commitments—can be redescribed and shown to look good or bad, he does seem to be making a skeptical claim about society, one that contains what I think are reductionist claim about language.

The upshot, as I think the above passage illustrates, is that Rorty's disquotationalist view of truth seems not to be justified by the example above.[44] A person who maintains, as Rorty does, that there is no important difference between the statements "snow is white" is true and the statement "snow is white" is, in my opinion, making an antirealist claim. But, as mentioned

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[43] Wittgenstein, 100e.

[44] Rorty's disquotationalist and deflationary views of truth hold that the word true cannot be defined and that there is nothing abstract that we can say about truth. Reality itself has no nature and it is unprofitable to ask questions about the nature of human experience. "When Davidson talks about the need to save the concept from those who would give "epistemic or pragmatic" theories of truth, he has in mind the cautionary use of 'true.' When he is saving the concept from disquotationalists like Horwich, however, he talks about the Tarskian what-is-preserved-in-valid-inferences use of 'true'. The only connection between these two uses, apart from the phonetic, seems to be the fact that assertibility is ***not*** preserved in valid inferences. So both uses of 'true' can usefully be distinguished from assertibility. But then so can the use of 'true' to mean "accurately representing the intrinsic nature of reality." Being different from assertibility is easy. These various Wittgensteinian doubts boil down to something like this: the question is not whether we have exhausted the concept of truth, or gotten truth right. It is, rather, whether we have sorted out the [various] uses of the word 'true', decided which of them had better be discarded, and specified the functions performed by the remainder." Richard Rorty, "Response to Donald Davidson," in *Rorty and His Critics*, 77.

previously, Rorty maintains that he is not making these sorts of claims, but rather that his whole point is to move beyond the "atmosphere of uncanniness" that he (and Wittgenstein as Rorty uses him) thinks has made it difficult for us to see what is actually going on when we speak about "reality." Rorty severs the connection between mind and world through a linguistic analysis that he presents as a practical and concrete means of clearing up the meanings of our palimpsested terms and focusing our attention on what we are actually talking about.[45] Here his linguistic pragmatism retains the pragmatic focus on concrete steps designed to improve our daily lives.[46] But Rorty's deflationary or disquotationalist view of truth also argues that our willingness to assert that a statement is actually true adds nothing to the understanding of an issue as we engage in discourse with our fellows. But McDowell and Searle argue that the assumption of world-directedness is essential for meaningful talk about society.

In Rorty's antifoundationalism, becoming comfortable with "looks-claims" rather than "is-claims" allows us to see descriptions as useful tools.[47] So Rorty offers descriptions that he hopes will catch on and become the sorts of things that can be meaningful for others in the community, and he understands this as an activity that can proceed without proposing grounds or

[45] See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 175-178. McDowell argues that Wittgenstein's quietism is inconsistent with his taking an antirealist position or arguing for the indeterminacy of meaning in such a way as to make meaning appear "spooky."

[46] See John Dewey, *Vol. 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty*, 219-220. Dewey says, "This constant throwing of emphasis back upon a change made in ourselves instead of one made in the world in which we live seems to me the essence of what is objectionable in 'subjectivism'….It is not in the least implied that change in personal attitudes, in the disposition of the 'subject', is not of great importance. Such change, on the contrary, is involved in any attempt to modify the conditions of the environment. But there is a radical difference between a change in the self that is cultivated and valued as an end, and one that is a means to alteration, through action, of objective conditions. The Aristotelean-mediaeval conviction that highest bliss is found in contemplative possession of ultimate Being presents an ideal attractive to some types of mind; it sets forth a refined sort of enjoyment. It is a doctrine congenial to minds that despair of the effort involved in creation of a better world of daily experience." I find myself in agreement with Dewey and I think that Rorty's linguistic approach, although he would see it as a continuation of Dewey's project, threatens to move us closer to the subjectivism that Dewey wants to avoid.

[47] *TP*, 151.

constraints other than the conversational ones imposed by our local, contingent community. But Rorty is also distinguishing between the private ironist and the public liberal. Here we might ask, is redescribing the Cartesian mind the same thing as redescribing our moral commitments? We can make sense of "minds" without reference to the world, but can we make sense of the concept of justice with reference to what the community thinks is "just" rather than to actually existing states of affairs in the external world? His linguistic pragmatism offers us a view of the realist debate concerning knowledge without (seemingly without) taking a position on realism (aside from noting that, properly understood, a new antirepresentationalist view of language makes this debate obsolete).

I will not go into detail here, but this issue has a long history in Western thought. It surfaces in the approach of Pyrrhonean skeptics during the Hellenistic period who refused to assent to any proposition that claimed to be about "non-evident" matters—including the academic skeptic's claim that the world is unknowable.[48] I think Rorty is dealing with a similar problem (and a similar dilemma). He is making a claim about how things are, while at the same time, striving to avoid being labeled either a realist or an antirealist. He also seems to make claims about two different kinds of skepticism. With respect to epistemological skepticism, I think both Rorty and McDowell present arguments that show us how we can move beyond the debate about knowledge as practiced in the Cartesian and British-empiricist style. But when Rorty turns to an analysis of society (i.e., an analysis that locates truth in the local human consensus), I find that his idea of final vocabularies functions like a skeptical, reductionist argument concerning language that borders on a kind of Linguistic Idealism. At any rate, in the

[48] Benson Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism*,90-91.

view I am offering, Rorty does seem to be making claims that are not merely therapeutic, but rather, to the extent that they take away our ability to speak about a rational as opposed to a merely causal connection between mind and world, they tend towards the pernicious.[49]

Why Rorty and the Linguistic Turn Matter

My dissertation looks at an old question in the history of philosophy: Is it possible for us human beings to critique the inherited traditions extant in a society, given the fact that we too are members of the culture we are trying to critique? As a citizen of the United States, I understand my inherited traditions, as well as the philosophical traditions we are currently discussing, in light of the European democratic and Judeo-Christian moral traditions prevalent in North American culture. Rorty does as well. But he goes further. Rorty embraces what he calls a frank "ethnocentrism," saying that we do not need a theory to criticize our inherited traditions. All we need do is simply start from where we are currently. His pragmatism suggests that no better starting point is available to human beings. While I am in agreement with much of Rorty's critique of knowledge, I do think that our moral and political commitments can be grounded in experience and not just in the social or conversational constraints that Rorty describes.

Moreover, he argues that the belief we have had historically concerning truth and justification, that is, that human beings can obtain a better or a correct starting point thus enabling them to ground values, rationally, in nonhuman structures, is one that leads to mistaken claims. Theories, Rorty maintains, that presuppose such starting points have never been possible

[49] I think Rorty realizes this in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. In his analysis of Orwell' *s1984,* Rorty devotes considerable space to the character of O'Brien. I suspect he sees a similarity between his and O'Brien's non-realism.

for human beings insofar as these actually serve as rational, justificatory grounds for our most important values. This dissertation does not settle the issue concerning a God's Eye View of history. However, what it strives to do is focus attention on how Rorty specifically, and linguistic theory in general, take arguments against foundationalist epistemology and combine them with insights gleaned from twentieth-century linguistics to construct arguments against conceptions of justification that seek to root our views of knowledge empirically rather than in our conventional linguistic practices alone. Central to the argument are two ideas: the first concerns the Myth of the Given and the cause/justification distinction; the second concerns the testimony of introspection with our accompanying realist intuitions. Although this dissertation does not critique the Linguistic Turn directly—or claim that the "turn" was a mistake—, it does aim to be a small step in the direction of challenging some of its presuppositions concerning language and reality. Specifically, I challenge the Rortyean view that (1) the world causes beliefs, but it does not justify them, and that (2) the only thing to which we humans are answerable is to other human beings.

CHAPTER 1

RORTY'S PARADIGM SHIFT: THE LIBERAL IRONIST

Richard McKay Rorty was born in New York in 1931. At the age of fifteen he went off to the University of Chicago. A committed "Platonist," his initial interest in philosophy focused on the attempt to effect a synthesis between private and public, to ascend the divided line and show that virtue and knowledge really are the same. As he explains, I thought Plato "had to be right, for only then could one hold reality and justice in a single vision." Many of Rorty's relatives had been active in progressive circles. His father James had broken with the American Communist Party in 1932, but Rorty says that his childhood experience shaped his outlook so that he "grew up knowing that all decent people were, if not Trotskyites, at least socialists."[50]

Eventually Rorty became disillusioned with the philosophical goals he had at Hutchins College in the University of Chicago and concluded that the entire project of seeking a synthesis between one's concerns for social justice (public) and whatever private interests one has is a misguided endeavor. But he never lost interest in social justice. The tension between these two spheres (and the response to it that Rorty recommends) received expression in his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989). As Rorty explains, if one relinquishes one's goals as a metaphysician, if one finally accepts that there is no God or no "real" world that can make us right with respect to how things really are, that we will never succeed in grounding our views through "an appeal to something eternal, absolute, and good," then the question "what, if anything, philosophy is good for" becomes pressing.[51] Rorty's active intellectual life, and his

[50] Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 9, 6.
[51] Ibid., 8.

prolific career spanning five decades, leads one to conclude that whatever we say about philosophy's purpose, "continuing the conversation" (the one "moral" concern he thinks philosophers should have) remained an important part of his humanism.[52]

I share Rorty's humanist concerns. Even though I treat critics of Rorty in this dissertation, we should note, periodically, that the central issue concerns a point that we philosophers worry about: Is there anything that we can speak about that is true in the sense that it corresponds, in some sense, to a mind-independent world? Rorty's insistence that the world stands only in causal relations to our beliefs severs the connection between a mind-independent world—the logical space of nature—and the issue of justification. So the issues raised in this dissertation concern, not the importance of social justice—for, as we can see, Rorty does think it important to talk about our "moral responsibilities to other people." Rather, the issue concerns the debate that we philosophers have concerning what exactly it is that we do when we justify beliefs. Yet I do not think that the issue turns simply on, as Rorty puts it, the willingness of a person to accept that she is making a "looks-claim" rather than an "is-claim."[53] This is part of it, but the main issue concerns Rorty's criticism of philosophy (his metaphilosophical critique of theory). Specifically, it concerns his use of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy and the direction in which he argues philosophy should proceed once we make the turn. More specifically, this new direction (and Rorty does seem to speak about the Linguistic Turn as if it is a revolutionary new way of doing philosophy—a paradigm shift that is occurring in "our" time), is understood by Rorty as one that promises to free us from the presuppositions of foundationalist epistemology.

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[52] *PMN*, 394.
[53] Richard Rorty, *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*, 151.

Yet, contra McDowell, Searle, and Richard Bernstein, this revolutionary view of knowledge, if taken too far, also seems bereft of any form of empirical knowledge (world-directedness) or even of any form of experience that, understood traditionally as empiricist and pragmatists see it, has been central to the critique of essence (a line of criticism that Rorty continues). So, to the state one aspect of the problem at hand, if Rorty is correct about language, then he is correct about truth and justification—the only constraints on our interpretations are the conversational ones imposed on us by other human beings. But if his idea of linguistic redescription is not correct, if there is something that crosses-over the "unbridgeable" divide between causes and justifications, if every attempt to speak about grounds is not an attempt to speak about God, nonhuman standards, or non-linguistic things in themselves, then it seems that an important assumption Rorty makes about the possibility of grounding values is not sound. The cause/justification distinction, as it develops from Kant through Hegel, receives expression in the analytical tradition with Wilfrid Sellars's attack on the Myth of the Given in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956).[54] This idea plays a central role in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* where Rorty critiques the idea of truth as correspondence with reality. This issue endures as an abiding theme in Rorty's work receiving expression, a decade later, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* in his treatment of irony and the contingency of our values.

1.1 The Private Ironist and the Public Liberal

Philosophical works begin, sometimes, with a catch-phrase or a hook that grabs our attention. Aristotle tells us that all men by nature desire to know, while Jean-Jacques Rousseau

[54] See Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997).

observes that man is born free and is everywhere in chains. Rorty begins in a slightly more modest fashion, but the theoretical implications are prodigious. In Rorty's postmetaphysical, linguistic approach to knowledge, we learn that all "human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives."[55] This idea of carrying about words is central to understanding of his critique of knowledge. We humans are not primarily "knowers" or "spirits" or "workers" who relate to others through, for example, labor. We are producers of words.[56] Rorty frames this question against the backdrop of the failure of the tradition of philosophy-as-epistemology to provide grounds for humanism. These grounds were thought to be derived either a priori (by rationalist dogma), or empirically, in the sense that an understanding of what the human mind was capable also had normative important, even though it was seen as derived from simple empirical observation. Both attempts make the mistake of privileging the Given.

Rorty wants to avoid such mistakes and the ensuing skepticism he understands to follow these failed attempts to ground beliefs. Still, one of his goals in critiquing this tradition is to encourage a widening liberal, tolerant, pluralistic democracy (humanism) that avoids the problems associated with foundationalism. But as Michael Williams points out, this is at odds with the therapeutic approach that aims at dissolving problems. The antirepresentalist, linguistic presuppositions contained in Rorty's thought, lead to the conclusion that there is no essential difference between the way in which we talk about facts and the ways in which we talk about

[55] *CIS* 73.
[56] My scare quotes are intended to reference Aristotle, Descartes, and Marx. I do not mean to suggest that Rorty seeks a ground in the same way, but with the linguistic turn, language and the socialization processes become more important than previous candidates for "starting points" earlier theorists had privileged.

moral and political matters. But Rorty seems, himself, to draw conclusions about what we should do, based on a skeptical (ironic) approach to the issue of contingency.

In a sense, he does what pragmatists say we should never do: He finds "a kind of truth in skepticism."[57] In these moments, the quietism Rorty favors vanishes and we see a connection between his idea of final vocabularies and the activities that fall under the heading of linguistic redescription. When redescription, which presupposes radical contingency, is applied to our common life, it surfaces in the form of final vocabularies that are employed for whatever purposes we might have. The liberal ironist, as Rorty explains, is aware of the contingency of her vocabulary, but she still manages to stand resolutely for her beliefs. Although she realizes that her beliefs cannot be right with respect to how things are in reality or with respect to mind-independent standards, she still advocates for her views with the same fervor, presumably, as the metaphysician who thinks his views are buttressed by a conception of justification that connects his view with the external world (extra-linguistic structures). But, one might wonder, does the ironist really have continuing doubts about lessening cruelty? This is the idea I mentioned earlier: The idea here is that, according to Rorty, cruelty is the worst thing that we humans do to one another. One can assume, as Williams does, that whether he is in the study or in the street, that Rorty does not find the vocabulary of de Maistre ("the priest and the executioner") as impressive as that of John Stuart Mill ("experiments in living"), even though Rorty's ironist maintains that that any vocabulary can be shown to look good or bad.[58] As Bernstein notes, pragmatists embrace fallibilism, but not skepticism.[59] Rorty would probably say that he is just

[57] Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," 75.
[58] Ibid., 76.
[59] Richard Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 112.

talking about what strikes him as pretty good (or bad), and that that is all we have ever done. However, thin or thick, this seems to me like a starting point that is rooted in the space of nature rather than the space of reasons.

Critics of Rorty, such as Searle, think principles do require grounds. But critics of the vocabulary of objectivity think that the "claims of disinterest, objectivity and universality," presupposed in the Western philosophic tradition, "are not to be trusted, and themselves tend to reflect local historical conditions."[60] Rorty admits that these postmodernist "leftists" hold antifoundationalist views that are remarkably similar to the ones he holds. And he deplores, as does Searle, such "dreadful sentences" as the one above; however, in focusing on the usefulness of our social practices, Rorty thinks he heads off both the need for grounds as well as the belief that our tradition is corrupt due, in part, to the way it presupposes, disingenuously, the ability of a speaker to obtain objectivity and universality with respect to the principles one adopts. In short, Rorty shares the liberalism of thinkers such as Habermas and Bernstein, while also adopting the antifoundationalism of thinkers such as Nietzsche and Jacques Derrida.

The problem I see is that Rorty's metaphilosophical concerns about grounds give him a great deal to say about the problems of correspondence and very little to say—due to his concerns about privileging his own perspective—about the underlying presuppositions that lead fellow antifoundationalist to construct those "dreadful sentences." If we think of the ancient skeptic's avoidance of statements concerning inapprehensibles, we see, in my view, a contemporary analogue in Rorty's avoidance of talk concerning the deepest level of the self:

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[60] George Levine, Peter Brooks, Jonathan Culler, Marjorie Garber, E. Ann Kaplan, and Catherine R. Stimpson, "Speaking for the Humanities," The American Council of Learned Societies, ACLS Occasional Paper, no. 7 (1989), 18; quoted in Rorty, *TP*, 69.

Rorty's argument against principles is rooted in historical contingency, in ways that mirror his critique of Cartesian minds. But here, one's final vocabularies are represented, by Rorty, as things that we need to see, not as representing reality or as containing universal communicative presuppositions, but as linguistic performances that do not throw their hooks around anything. And Rorty's idea of final vocabularies is reductionist, in my view, in ways that his linguistic re-thinking of epistemological skepticism is not. If linguistic redescription is successful, the society he envisions will be one in which "the demand for a theory which unifies the public and private" will no longer seem necessary to its members.[61] We will have "useful" liberal political values without the accompanying belief that these require a rational or universal theoretical ground.[62] Since the world causes but does not justify, it follows that we can change our descriptions and the social world could change as well. To be sure, this would eliminate the possibility that our views are wrong because, for example, a proper understanding of the sacred text tells us so, but it also prevents a view of justice from being correct because it better describes how things are than the ideologically motived *apologia* for the status quo. In other words, locating justification in the community alone, gives up on a notion of truth which I think we should retain (world-directness). Locating justification in the community alone, also gives us, what McDowell calls, a view of justification that is frictionless—our interpretations are informed only by the beliefs we acknowledge within the logical space of reasons, independent of the space of nature.

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[61] *CIS*, xv.

[62] See Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 235. Bernstein makes a similar criticism. He thinks Rorty's determination to avoid correspondence causes him to dismiss a diverse group of theorists he calls "communitarians." Rorty affirms liberalism, but his linguistic pragmatism "deprives us of the analytic tools needed for clarifying and getting a grip on important differences" between alternative approaches to dealing with the tension between individual and society.

In Rorty's treatment of the issue, the problems associated with correspondence theories of truth (the idea that our words represent something real in the external world), figure prominently in a sustained critique of foundational epistemology. His critique shares many of the same features we find in the work of theorists whom Rorty identifies as ironists: Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault. Ironists are nominalist and historicist in their thinking with respect to truth. They recognize the contingency of their own values and projects, describing and redescribing themselves without regard to anything such as "nature" or the "deepest level of the self." For the ironist, "socialization goes all the way down." A person can never be right with respect to an order beyond time. To drop the notion that the truth is "out there" independent of our minds, is the same as to drop the notion of "the world as God's project." The world never "decides which descriptions are true," and the ironist recognizes and accepts this.[63] Here Rorty describes ironism using the same language he does when describing the attitude we should take with respect to epistemological skepticism. We should see that metaphysical constructs, such as the Cartesian mind, came about through talk and, as such, these constructs can be replaced with other forms of talk such as talk about our physical brain states. Here, any theorist who argues that these therapeutic approaches must at least be willing to assert that science (biology or neurology) gets things right in a correspondence sense, can be accused of the begging the question against Rorty.

Since the language of neuro-science is a contingent historical development, we cannot regard it as "getting things right" either. But what about society? Are all descriptions really

[63] Ibid., 5.

equal good? In his Presidential Address to the American Philosophical Association given in 1979, Rorty explains that

> "Relativism" is the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as every other. No one holds this view. Except for the occasional cooperative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good. The philosophers who get *called* "relativists" are those who say that the grounds for choosing between such opinions are less algorithmic than had been thought. Thus one may be attacked as a relativist for holding that familiarity of terminology is a criterion of theory-choice in physical science, or that coherence with the institutions of the surviving parliamentary democracies is a criterion in social philosophy. When such criteria are invoked, critics say that the resulting philosophical position assumes an unjustified primacy for "our conceptual framework," or our purposes, or our institutions. The position in question is criticized for not having done what philosophers are employed to do: explain why our framework, or culture, or interests, or language, or whatever, is at last on the right track—in touch with physical reality, or the moral law, or the real numbers, or some other sort of object patiently waiting about to be copied. So the real issue is not between people who think one view as good as another and people who do not. It is between those who think our culture, or purpose, or intuitions cannot be supported except conversationally, and people who still hope for other sorts of support.[64]

Rorty would like to move beyond both relativism and realism. To accomplish this, he employs both historicist and antirepresentationalist critiques of epistemology. Theorists such as McDowell take issue with his antirepresentationalist views which he sees as not sufficiently world-directed. Other critics, such as Searle and Taylor, take issue with his relativism which is both historicist and antirepresentationalist. McDowell's pragmatism shares the historicist presuppositions common to all pragmatists as I understand matters. But the antirepresentationalist linguistic skepticism, a view that surfaces in Rorty's idea of final vocabularies, is utilized by Rorty in his arguments against both world-directedness as well as universalism and moral realism. In other words, Rorty employs a kind of world-directedness of

[64] Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism, Irrationalism," in his *Consequences of Pragmatism*, 166-67.

thought in his private/public distinction. He praises common life and sees it as a realm of activity that can function without the need to make ourselves right with respect to any larger, nonhuman truths.

But one can be historicist in one's thinking without abjuring world-directedness. Cartesian minds can be redescribed, unproblematically I would argue, since they may not have ever existed. But, to use a rather simple and obvious example, the bus coming towards me should probably not be treated in the same manner. The skeptic in common life will not live as long as the skeptic in the study. Rorty, of course, is not an Academic or a Global Skeptic. Still, as I have argued, he is a skeptic with respect to epistemology. Moreover, if one were challenged to offer a definition of relativism that applied to some philosophical systems, but not to Rorty's, I confess I would be unable to do so. And still further, when we look at the answers he gives to critics who charge him with relativism and non-realism, we see what I think can be characterized as a blind spot in his thinking that I am characterizing as a reductionist tendency rather than a therapeutic or redescriptive salve. As Williams asks, why doesn't Rorty's skepticism lead to radical doubts our deepest values in common life? Does "Rorty himself [betray] a hint of disquiet" in this biperspectival view that separates the private ironist from the public liberal?[65]

1.2 Aesthetic Reason and the Biperspectival Perspective

Even though Rorty is himself an ironist, he is not satisfied with what he calls the uselessness of ironism when the conversation turns to the desire for solidarity and social justice. Ironists focus on private projects. Writers like Marcel Proust do not care "whether we adopt"

[65] Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," 75.

their descriptions or "re-create" ourselves anew in words that we choose. The narrative self-creation that ironists practice does not depend on propositions concerning the way things are in reality. Once the ironist finishes her redescriptive task, the old words, in which people used to frame their questions, will be replaced by new words in such a way that "people will no longer ask questions phrased in the old words."[66] The picture Rorty paints depicts change as the result of new descriptions.

The new picture of knowledge, Rorty explains, his antifoundationalism (or antirepresentationalism as he prefers to call it), affirms the place of the ironist's linguistic critique of foundationalist epistemology as a vehicle for social change. Even though he insists that he is "not putting hermeneutics forward as the successor subject to epistemology," the redescriptive power he reserves for language, its capacity to facilitate social change, will be pointless unless an ineradicable wedge is driven between word and thing, subject and object, and the real world and the ways in which we represent it to ourselves.[67] As I am arguing, Rorty's linguistic pragmatism does presuppose such a gap between descriptions and the external world thought to exist independently of the knower. With a view toward Sellars's Myth of the Given, Rorty understands language to belong to the logical space of reasons, and, as such, the brute force impacts, privileged by empiricists, become uninterpreted entities that do not figure into to

[66] Ibid., 78.
[67] Rorty, *PMN*, 315. Rorty would probably say there is a permanent wedge between subject and object. But, he would probably add, one would not complain about this unless one had already been exposed to prejudices, contained within in the tradition of Western metaphysics, concerning what knowledge should be. If we frame the question differently, the problem will disappear. That seems correct in my opinion, but we could say that about almost anything. In a sense, this is one of the key issues being raised concerning Rorty's linguistic pragmatism. Anything that has been deconstructed can also be reconstructed. The *Fragestellung* is involved in both building and tearing down one's interpretive framework. Enframing aside, it still may be possible that socialization does not go all the way down.

what we think of as knowledge (a justified, true belief).[68] But Bernstein thinks Rorty is actually substituting a "historical myth of the given" for the "epistemological myth of the given" he helped expose.[69] Moreover, as McDowell and Searle argue, his critique of correspondence helps widen that gap by depicting any assertion about the external world, or the deepest level of the self, as a form of correspondence metaphysics that could make sense only if one had—what Rorty represents pejoratively as—a language that one could describe as "Nature's Own." Those who think we can bridge this gap are metaphysicians who think that nature has something to say about the correctness of our descriptions and interpretations.

We see this basic tenent of Rorty's thought in the following statement about criticism and language: "Nothing can serve as a criticism of a person save another person, or a culture save another culture—for persons and cultures are, for us [ironists], incarnated vocabularies."[70] Statements such as this bring to mind the charges his critics level concerning relativism and linguistic idealism. One cannot, of course, successfully advance such critiques on the strength of one sentence. But the ease with which Rorty oscillates between historicism and antirepresentationalism does make one think that the liberal ironist, as he describes her, secretly

[68] In my view, this argument is strikingly similar to David Hume's argument concerning causality. Although Hume acknowledges our *belief* in cause and effect, he insists that experience does not give us the *idea* of a necessary connection between X and Y. In similar fashion, Rorty distinguishes between a belief and knowledge. The world causes beliefs, but it does not justify them. Experience does not produce the idea of necessity in Hume, and in Rorty, experience does not produce warranted beliefs, it produces mere beliefs (that can only be justified by linguistic descriptions that do not come from the logical space of nature).

[69] Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 244.

[70] *CIS*, 80. See also, Frank Verges, "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," *Philosophy* vol. 67, no. 261 (July 1992), 388. I note above the similarity between arguments concerning empirical knowledge and the idea of necessity and Rorty's use of the cause/justification distinction. Verges notes a related similarity between the linguistic turn and Bishop Berkeley's analysis of ideas. Both strike Verges as forms of idealism: "As Richard Rorty has noted, slogans which proclaim the opacity of the signifier, or that there is nothing outside the text, amount to the claim that nothing can be like a signifier (or text) but another signifier (or text). Thus construed, they are current reworkings of the earlier, idealist slogan, most famously defended by Bishop Berkeley, that nothing can be like an idea but another idea."

reservs for herself an ability to speak about common life in ways that Rorty depicts as unproblematic; whereas, for the liberal theorist, talk about the world is viewed as more than common sense talk about how things seem. The desire to make more than a "seems-claim" is, for Rorty, one of the reasons for the metaphysician's falling back into talk of the Given. Ironist talk about how things seem, as with Pyrrhonean skepticism's talk about appearance, does not.

To reiterate the point that Williams makes above, Rorty is not an epistemological skeptic, but he is a skeptic with respect to epistemology. Here Rorty employs one of the "Agrippan" modes (question begging) that he has already "smuggled in through the definition of final vocabulary."[71] Since there are no noncircular answers, no means available to us in Rorty's view that permit a rational distinction between causes and justifications, it would be pointless for an ironist to demand extra-linguistic justification for our arguments. Here we see the historicity of human existence and the cultural-situatedness of values—conclusions about what we can know that utilize nonpropositional forms of knowledge—represented as an accurate description of how things are. Again to reiterate, Rorty's idea of final vocabularies sounds like a truth culled from skepticism and not a side-stepping of metaphysics through equally plausible descriptions and counter-descriptions. Of course, Rorty does not see it this way and says that the ironist, unlike the metaphysician, does not feel the need for a "noncircular theoretical backup" for her beliefs.[72]

But some who are interested in justice (such as Searle) do feel the need to provide a noncircular, rational, or universal ground for their political convictions. They think a synthesis between private and public is still possible and necessary. Moreover, theorists who think that the content of our empirical beliefs does impinge, rationally, on beliefs will not think that the choice

[71] Williams, "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth," 77.
[72] Ibid., xv.

we face is between a language that is "Nature's Own" and a linguistic theory that argues against the possibility of words throwing their "hooks" around external material objects. There are other alternatives to either (1) accurate representation or (2) a thorough-going antirepresentationalism (a view of knowledge that I am calling linguistic pragmatism and Bernstein calls linguistic idealism).

But the point for Rorty is not to skate around the periphery of foundational epistemology. He wants to sketch a new path away from these "dead-end" arguments about representation. But as a common sense matter of fact, Rorty notes that political discourse traditionally has been couched in the language of metaphysics. The ironist critic of metaphysics, who stresses the creative capacities that individuals have to "make" truths, rather than to "find" them, desires, as Rorty puts it, to "fight clear" of this tradition. Her work, couched in the vocabulary of self-creation, is necessarily private, while the vocabulary of the liberal—that which is concerned with justice—is shared and public. Still, Rorty thinks it is possible to replace metaphysics with ironism in our "public rhetoric" while making progress with respect to humanist goals.[73] But as an ironist, he wants to do so without succumbing to the liberal metaphysician's desire to offer grounds for our political principles. So Rorty proposes to separate the two spheres: the private ironist tells us how to engage in narrative self-creation, while the public liberal (once cured of his belief in universal grounds and the world-directedness of thought) is content to describe and redescribe our social world in ways that, Rorty hopes, will make us "less cruel." Both are desirable and should remain separate.[74]

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[73] Ibid., 85.

[74] Rorty delights in using language that provokes. This is part of his desire to keep the "conversation" going. His liberalism, he explains, is a form of ethnocentrism, but he insists that this is a good thing. In using words like "us," Rorty refers to other members of "our" community, i.e., liberals who have already adopted the same final

1.3 McCarthy and Habermas on Accepting Ironism

Rorty acknowledges that his proposed separation does not sit well with either ironists or liberals. He thinks the ironist has much to offer when the issue concerns private perfection, but when we face intransigent social problems, ironism is "at best useless and at worst dangerous."[75] Public liberals, who still think that the Enlightenment conception of reason has something of value to offer, think that abandoning the requirements of universalism is a mistake. Liberals like Jürgen Habermas, who Rorty notes "are still inclined to see the desire for private perfection as infected with 'irrationalism' and 'aestheticism,'" think it is necessary to distinguish between the different sorts of values one prefers.[76] He thinks Rorty is too quick to flatten all rational distinctions between values. Theory still has a place in the defense of humanism, for Habermas,

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vocabularies as "we" have. There are, however, other non-European approaches to the problem of language, values, and the contingency of human knowledge that offer critiques of Rorty's antirepresentationalism. In a review of a book by Yong Huang entitled *Rorty, Pragmatism, and Confucianism* (2009), Andrew Lambert notes the following: "Cheng explores what he believes are tacit essentialist assumptions underpinning Rorty's presentation of contingency. Though Rorty believes the current emphasis on being sensitive to cruelty is simply the product of contingent historical events, Cheng claims that such sensitivity points to an essentialist truth: 'From the Confucian perspective, this is a revelation of some capacity in a human person we may call human nature: *ren* (benevolence, co-humanity, interhumanity).' Second, Cheng argues that Rorty's claims about the contingency of language, self, and community are in fact founded on incomplete analyses of these phenomena. For example, Rorty stresses the expressivist function of language in private self-creation on the model of Nietzsche or the romantic poets. But this, Cheng argues, is only one function of language; properly understood, language is inherently social. It 'reflects the commonly shared creative and cognitive abilities of oneself and others, which eventually would present a vision of the moral community as a critical guiding principle for individual or group action.' And in attributing to Confucianism just this view of language, self, and society, Cheng claims that Confucian thought can function as a critique of, or corrective to, Rorty's relativism." See Andrew Lambert, review of *Rorty, Pragmatism, and Confucianism*, by Yong Huang, *Philosophy East and West* 62, no. 1 (January 2012): 135. As I understand Rorty's approach, the idea that cruelty is the worst we do is, for Rorty, a kind of starting point. However, Rorty does not think, and this is consistent with his idea that there are no grounds for our humanist principles, that we can ground our "starting points" in any sort of true understanding of the self or language. As a public liberal, Rorty would probably agree with Cheng, but as a private ironist, he would argue that these values cannot be grounded in our knowledge of a human "capacity" or of "human nature." However, with Lambert and Cheng, I would argue that, as we see with McDowell and Bernstein, there is available to us a richer conception of experience—one that does not leave us with a merely "linguistic" theory of knowledge and personhood that McDowell characterizes as a "frictionless spinning in the void." See John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 66. A richer conception of experience seeks to bridge the gap between mind and world by showing how justification is not isolated in the realm of the logical space of reasons, but does cross-over into the space of nature.

[75] *CIS*, 68.

[76] *CIS*, xiv.

because, as Rorty notes, he does not trust ironists like Nietzsche and Heidegger. Justice, he thinks, requires rational grounds that enable us to distinguish between "just" statements and "ideological" ones. But the distinction between true statements and rhetorical ones is no more clearer to Rorty—the line between logic and rhetoric, good arguments and the "merely" rhetorical ones—than the distinction between scheme and content; so, for these reasons, Rorty's linguistic pragmatism, in avoiding the metaphysical commitments that underlie these distinctions, pays too high of a price for liberals like Habermas to countenance.

Seen in this light, the relativism implicit in Rorty's private/public split prevents us from making distinctions (the desired distinctions in Habermas's view) between good/bad, and rational/irrational (or ideological). The refusal to see a difference between these sorts of statements (and this is what Habermas thinks we find in Rorty's refusal to see any significant difference between truth and justification) leads to the sort of flattening we see in Rorty's pragmatism. Habermas thinks this flattening can be avoided by liberals who, like Rorty, are committed to avoiding subject-centered philosophy of consciousness while also stressing a commitment to humanism. But Rorty does not think a theory of communication will be of much use when talking to people who do not share our perspective. A "sophisticated" Nazi, for example, will not be persuaded of the wrongness of his views when we tell him that his statements "are incompatible with the construction of a society in which communication is undistorted, and that his refusal of a voice to his opponents contradicts the presupposition of his own communicative acts."[77] In an effort to hold onto the best insights of the ironist and the public liberal, Rorty proposes a postmetaphysical liberalism that separates the private and public

[77] Richard Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1990), 636.

spheres of life. Here we will be liberals, without being metaphysicians. In Rorty's postmetaphysical "utopia," the liberal ironist functions as a quasi-Nietzschean overman (she will posit liberal values and also refrain from "sneering" at secular Christian morality). Rorty's ironist recognizes that the values she holds are contingent (and hence not true), but—like a confident overman—she will stand for them resolutely.

The liberal ironist sees social problems as linguistic problems.[78] Her task is not to produce arguments. For her, the challenge is to "show" how things might look when rearranged. This is how Rorty sees his task: to playfully "josh" his opponents into seeing how things might be described using different terms.[79] As Rorty explains, and here the accent falls on description rather than argument:

> awareness that my beliefs "'may turn out to be false after all'"…does not open me up to criticism from the poor lost souls who write me abusive twelve-page single-spaced letters, replete with diagrams exhibiting the nature of the universe. I *am* opened up to criticism by critics like Habermas, McCarthy, Nancy Fraser, and others, because they are able to redescribe my own position in terms that make me say, "Gee, there might be something to that; when so described, I *do* look pretty bad." The "moment of unconditionality" is, in Ludwig Wittgenstein's phrase, "a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it,…not part of the mechanism." "Idealizing elements" do nothing to help me sort out the nut cases from the people to whom it pays to listen.[80]

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[78] Rorty is not a nominalist with respect to words, but he does suggest, at times, that what we are really arguing about are words (especially when talking about "internal" motives and feelings). This is the legacy of the logical positivist tradition that influenced him in his youth. Post-positivist writers eventually reject the theory-observation distinction. This raises questions about external realism (in the natural sciences) and behaviorism (in social science and ethics). But even if we cannot defend the distinction between theoretical and observational statements, or if observational entities such as phlogiston turn out not to exist at all (which does suggest a nominalism with respect to words), the act of observing is not a statement. Hence, in my view, there still may be something in the external world about which we may speak correctly (or correctly to an extent). In short, as some writers hold especially when the issue turns to social knowledge, a sound analysis must retain an empirical dimension. See, for example, Herbert Gans, *The War Against the Poor* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 3. Gans insists, "[w]ords and actions are not the same, and I do not think society is a text."

[79] Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," in Robert Vaughn, ed., *The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom: Two Hundred Years* After (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 272.

[80] Richard Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," 635.

Rorty thinks that redescription, in ironist culture, can show us how things might look different not through *facts* about how things are but through the *imaginative discourse* of those around us. But I think he actually presupposes the existence of something more than this. I am arguing that Rorty's program, originally presented in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* as a re-thinking of the vocabulary of objectivity in order to perform a therapeutic healing on a society, one that has been determined (mistakenly) to answer the epistemological skeptic, has become, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, a reductionist critique of truth as answerability to the world (or mind-independent presuppositions). The reduction I find is one that consists of a skepticism that substitutes descriptions for things in the world, in the name of avoiding the Given—a view that we can change descriptions rather than changing the material world. Now, Rorty's idea that the world stands in causal, rather than justificatory relations to our beliefs, would prevent such a complete form of linguistic idealism. However, since he would still argue that the world does not justify, his view would prevent our conception of justice from ever being rational in the since that our fellows might be persuaded of the correctness of our position due to how things are in the external world.

We might, of course, persuade others discursively, but only if they accept (through reflection upon the contents of their conscious minds) that our description of "reality" is correct. This is, I take it, one of the ways to understand the notion that only a belief, which remains isolated on one side of the nature/reason dichotomy, can count as a reason holding a belief. Rorty's view of justification insists, like Davidson's, that "nothing can count as a reason for

holding a belief except for another belief."[81] So, I do not see any other way to characterize this other than to say that, as with Cartesian conscious reflection, we encounter something, in Rorty, at the level of conscious reflection that may or may not actually resemble something outside of us in the external world. This is very essence of representational knowledge that Rorty seeks to overcome, but it seems implicit in the linguistic theory that underlies his critique of correspondence.

Williams notes above that, since Rorty recognizes that no person actually believes "that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good," there must be some sort of criterion that enables Rorty's ironist to make her way in common life without accepting every ideologically motived statement that can be presented as plausible in the right sort of context. But, as I am arguing, the way that these views become "equally good" is by insisting on the sharp nature/reason dualism as Rorty does. Since coherence to existing social practices becomes the only acceptable means available, according to Rorty, for justifying our views, a statement cannot be good (or bad) with respect to how things are in the world. In other words, the theoretical implications of Rorty's argument concerning justification, if we follow these through logically, are that we really have no standards available for distinguishing between opposing views in the world-directed sense. Yet, at the same time, Rorty says no one actually holds the view that all beliefs are equally good. So why not? Is it possible that, at some point in the future, people will hold such a view concerning two radically opposed views? It seems that such a possibility does exist if we accept the nature/reason dichotomy that underlies Rorty's view of

[81] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 14. McDowell quotes Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", reprinted in Ernest LePore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 307-19.

justification. Those who resist this sort of redescriptive approach, in the view I offer of Rorty's work, are actually failing, as Rorty sees it, to accept that what they are doing is producing descriptions of states of affairs that can never actually be correct in any sense other than that the world has something to say about what we are justified in accepting as true; they are making justification correspondence to the nonhuman.

Of course, Rorty does not see the redescriptive task he envisions for the liberal ironist as a bookish game or an easy arm-chair task for people who despair of the actually work necessary to bring about positive changes. Nonetheless the private/public dualism he advocates creates a split between the academic's study and the non-intellectual's everyday life—the common political life we share. Moreover, and much to the chagrin of postmodernists, Rorty bemoans the "self-righteousness" of the academic Left in the United States. He longs for the days when leftist professors concerned themselves with real issues in politics "such as the availability of health care to the poor or the need for strong labor unions." Rorty agrees with Searle in condemning required university courses designed to shape student's sociopolitical attitudes, what students at Berkeley refer to as "compulsory chapel."[82] But unlike Searle, Rorty does not think "mind-independent" standards are needed to combat charges of relativism. Aside from talking about the procedures for bringing about agreement among inquirers—social practices that actually exist—,Rorty admits that he really does not know what we gain from talking about mind-independent reality.

I suppose one could say that Searle takes the challenge presented by relativistic world-views more seriously than Rorty. The suggestion that our beliefs can be reduced to contingent

[82] *TP*, 67.

practices and non-rational feelings seems, to philosophers such as Searle, like challenges that should be met with better theories of Reason, the self, and agency, rather than therapeutic strategies for coping. But Rorty wants neither the theory nor the power/knowledge politics of the ironist (the latter preference he shares with Searle). But I do not see how Rorty steers clear of the presuppositions underlying the views expressed at the extremes of both poles in this debate. To put this differently, if we think of the debate between Foucault and Habermas as one that concerns Reason and objectivity, Rorty agrees with the "theory" behind the antifoundationalist views of philosophers such as Foucault, but he also agrees with the politics of Habermas (while arguing the we should side-step the theoretical commitments). However, for every slap on the wrist he gives "cynical" postmodernists who are too concerned with power, a fatal death blow is meted out, by Rorty, to representational realists. We are left with the idea that we should stand resolutely for our convictions while accepting that theory (or world-directedness) cannot make one view "better" than any other. So I do not see Rorty sketching a path somewhere in between the two camps. To use a sports analogy, Rorty's game is not played in the middle of field, at the fifty-yard line, but rather, it is played almost entirely on the realist's end of the field.

1.4 Communicative Rationality and Ironism

Theorists such as McCarthy and Habermas think there is something universal underlying the idea of a just agreement. They also think that something more than linguistic redescription is needed.[83] But unlike Searle, they focus on communication rather than conscious introspection.

[83] As I understand Habermas's argument we can think of the material relations in society that lead to the exploitation of labor in communicative terms that, when reconstructed in a post-metaphysical theory of knowledge, allow us to talk about one-sided communication and presuppositions of universality—acceptance of a statement as valid by all concerned—as the key to understanding the difference between a good argument and a bad one.

The arguments Rorty employs against these ideas—ideas such as "unconditional validity" and context-transcending truth claims—are different from the ones he uses to expose the Given in the views we see from theorists who think that the epistemological skeptic needs to be answered. But his focus on local, contingent practices remains consistent each time. As Rorty explains:

> McCarthy thinks truth more important than I do. Specifically, he thinks that "'truth'…functions as an 'idea of reason' with respect to which we can criticize not only particular claims within our language but the very standards of truth we have inherited." By contrast, I think that what enables us to make such criticisms is concrete alternative suggestions—suggestions about how to redescribe what we are talking about. Some examples are Galileo's suggestions about how to redescribe the Aristotelian universe, Marx's suggestions about how to redescribe the nineteenth century, Heidegger's suggestions about how to redescribe the West as a whole, Dickens's suggestions about how to redescribe chancery law, Rabelais's suggestions about how to redescribe monasteries, and Virginia Woolf's suggestions about how to redescribe women writing.[84]

Here Rorty contrasts Truth with concrete descriptions. But there are reasons to think, as Bernstein explains, that Rorty's either/or dichotomy—as with many of the other dichotomies that structure his thought—makes it look as if an issue of great importance hinges on such either/or questions when, in fact, there is not nearly as much at stake as Rorty makes out:

> Rorty's labeling language game does not really get us very far in clarifying or resolving substantive differences. For he does not clarify what constitutes "the political" or how one is to evaluate critically competing political *arguments*. He writes as if something extremely important depends on labeling controversies about liberalism as "political" rather than "philosophical."…. [His] fateful, although shifting, dichotomies—either/or's that structure his thinking—lead him to all sorts of dubious and double-edged claims.[85]

We can read Rorty as "failing" to answer a critic or we can read him as offering a therapeutic re-thinking, one that cannot answer without also buying into the issue he wishes to side-step. But

[84] Richard Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," 634.
[85] Richard J. Bernstein, *The New Constellation – The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/Postmodernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 239-242.

Rorty's dichotomies also seem to have normative implications of their own. Descriptions of practices, after all, must be received through the faculty of receptivity. Our "talk" about the empirical content of our of beliefs, in Rorty's neo-Pragmatism, contains everything important that we see in the theories of Searle, McCarthy, and McDowell with one important exception: we can never say that our view contains a justificatory norm.

Searle and McCarthy can be seen as examples of philosophers whom Rorty calls public liberals. They wish to find some means by which we can ground our most important values. They also think, on some level according to Rorty, that these things are done most effectively through reference to how things really are. McCarthy understands these "true" statements as most effectively prosecuted when buttressed by a theory of reason that shows us what a valid statement looks like rationally. In similar fashion, McDowell and Searle think that our statements, that are intended to be truth claims, are made with an assumption that there is an objective world "out there" that stands in a rational relationship to our beliefs—that failure to qualify statements against such an empirical, world-directed backdrop results in a form of linguistic idealism that McDowell calls, with reference to Rorty's linguistic redescription, a "frictionless spinning in the void."[86]

If foundationalists such as Searle beg the question against Rorty with respect to a mind-independent reality, it is fair to ask if Rorty also begs the question against foundationalists in offering an analysis that codifies such a fast distinction between the private and public realms. This distinction mirrors the one he accepts from Sellars between the space of nature and the space of reasons. It is important for Rorty that justification never be seen as a relation between

[86] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 11.

the human to the nonhuman. Human maturity, according to Rorty, requires us to give up talk about answerability to the world just as we have given up the notion that Truth is answerable to the commands of God. But in prosecuting his thesis, Rorty does, at times, talk about "the world" or the logical space of nature in ways that seem to be more than merely a space containing causal relations that he maintains are the only acceptable relationships that obtain between humans and the nonhuman world. When Rorty talks about the "real" world, he says only the metaphysician wants Truth in the sense of an "is-claim." But is he assuming that there is a real world there simply in order to dispense with such a view? I realize that this is an old criticism made against skeptics, but perhaps it is Rorty who is already thinking in terms of answerability to the world (or of what Taylor calls representational realism) in order to advance the idea that no such representationalist views are possible. Perhaps Rorty insists on a standard of knowing that is so absurdly objective and universal that no theory of knowledge could ever cross over the chasm he opens up between causes and justifications.

Nevertheless, the advantage of his approach, Rorty maintains in good pragmatist fashion, is that it enables us to stop arguing, as philosophers, about representation and get on with the business of improving our society in the local moment. But the shift from *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* to *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, involves the shift from epistemological skepticism, the commodity in which we philosophers trade, to a post-metaphysical "utopia," now conceived, by Rorty, as the place where novelists and journalists do the important work since there is really nothing left, on the theoretical front, for a special discipline called philosophy to do. One can see, in my view, how Rorty is addressing a larger audience in the latter work. The metaphysical therapy he proposes earlier, one that is supposed to cure us philosophers of our

Cartesianism, starts to look like a linguistic theory of social change. Here we see, not merely therapeutic re-thinking, but reductionist moves in Rorty's thought (what Searle calls the urge to get rid of certain phenomena by "reducing them to less puzzling sorts of things"—a reductionist urge that "infects much of our intellectual life"[87]) that he represents as uncontroversial moves that are, nevertheless, capable of changing the nature of the debate in our society for intellectuals and nonintellectuals alike. Philosophers, in Rorty's liberal utopia, will stop talking about Truth and journalists will get on with the business of redescribing our social world, thus making our society less cruel and also side-stepping the need for Rational or theoretical grounds for our values.

1.5 Liberal and Nonliberal Ironists

Rorty understands that there are nonliberal ironists. But his pragmatism is not concerned to delineate a theory of reason that enables us to identify and defend the "right" values. He is not trying to answer the nonliberal with philosophical argument; his redescriptive approach has therapeutic properties that he hopes will open us up to new possibilities.[88] In Rorty's view, there

[87] John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 89.

[88] We might think here of an overwrought client who is "talked down" by a therapist who gives her an alternative way of seeing herself or her situation. Here redescription seems useful. But as Robert Bellah points out, good face-to-face, therapeutic communication, while it can be meaningful in the personal lives of individuals, does not appear to be useful in other situations. If, for instance, one experiences problems that are embedded in larger social or institutional structures, political rather than therapeutic discourse is required. One cannot, after all, have a therapeutic face-to-face discourse with a large corporate bureaucracy. See Robert Bellah et al, *Habits of the Heart* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985), 130-138. Moreover, as Keith Topper maintains, it is not clear what redescription provides, especially if we separate the private and public spheres, for debates that are most certainly public. See, Keith Topper, "Richard Rorty, Liberalism and the Politics of Redescription," *American Political Science Review* 4 (1995). Topper argues that Rorty's solution fails in the real world since the line between public and private is not as clearly drawn as Rorty understands it to be in his treatment of politics as linguistic redescription.

are no "knockdown answers" to moral perspectives such as we see with nonliberal ironists.[89] The best we can do is redescribe and show how things might look different. This way, others can be persuaded to change as we create new possibilities, linguistically, in the hope that new ways of speaking about "reality" will eventually "catch-on." The emphasis here is on the idea of the linguistic since, in light of the Myth of the Given, knowledge claims belong in a normative context within the logical space of reasons. When we say that a person is in a state of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of the state, as if there was something to be had called the "known thing." Our willingness to call a claim a knowledge claim stems from placing the person within the logical space of reasons. Here the justification for the claim comes from our conceptual capacities and beliefs—not from responsiveness to the received impressions owing to mind-independent worldly circumstances (as classical empiricist had believed). Empirical knowledge, as McDowell conceives it, results from the cooperation of impressions and ideas in Hume or what McDowell calls, borrowing from Kant, the cooperation of receptivity and spontaneity (sensibility and understanding).

To clarify, I think we can understand this issue concerning knowledge and the logical space of reasons in light of Hume's argument concerning causality. In Hume, we find that observation does not tell us that there exists a necessary connection between the so-called cause and the effect that follows. What I know is that observation tells me that, so far, every time I place my hand next to the fire I feel heat, but observation does not tell me that the feeling is necessarily connected to the fire. Necessity is a belief (or a trick of the imagination), but it is not knowledge since it is not copied from an impression found within nature (or the empirical

[89] Richard Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," 636.

world). Since, in Hume, knowledge consists of ideas that are copied from impressions, if there is no impression, then there can be no idea.

Now, to continue further, Rorty rejects this empiricist view of knowledge, but, as I understand him, the practices he talks about are analogous to Humean impressions. They are located in our shared worldly experiences, that is, on the left-hand side of his nature/reason dichotomy—the logical space of nature. As such, the *belief* in a necessary connection is analogous to the concept of justification which are both located on the right-hand side of the dualism, that is, within Sellars's logical space of reasons. And in an analogous way, the feeling of heat "causes" me to believe that there is necessary connection between fire and heat, in the same way that the world, according to Rorty, causes me to have beliefs, but does not justify me in asserting that I have a true belief about how things are in world. Hume's idea of a necessary connection and Rorty's idea of justification work the same way—they are both beliefs that we are unable to connect, in a rational way, to worldly circumstances or to experiences of how things are in the world. Rorty frequently characterizes the empiricist understanding of knowledge as one that seeks knowledge of things in themselves. But, in my view, his critique of knowledge extends not just to Platonic Forms, it applies to any statement about how things are in the external world. In the same way that a belief, in Hume, may not be produced by an impression, justifications, according to Rorty, are not rationally (necessarily) connected to the physical world. So a statement can be "caused" by the physical world, but it can never be justified by it.

If we could say something about the world that had nothing to with our own concepts, then we might have a basis for asserting that our knowledge claims are true rather than just

ethnocentric prejudices. But the "way things are," Rorty explains, prevents us from doing so in any manner other than the ways we have right now which constitute our common practices and procedures. This, the liberal theorist fears, leads to an unacceptable form of relativism, since, in the picture Rorty paints, we cannot distinguish between the two types of ironists that he says exist. Rorty does *distinguish* between them; however, he just does not do so in the manner the liberal theorist thinks we should. The difference between these two types of ironists is that the liberal ironist does not dismiss humanist values as quickly as does the nonliberal.

The nonliberal's failure, Rorty explains, is not that he misses a relevant *theoretical* difference. What the nonliberal ironist fails to recognize is that something like humanist values can be embodied in our social institutions. This is a significant oversight and it causes ironists such as Michel Foucault, in the view Rorty offers, to focus too much on power and on the negative side of the social sciences.[90] And, as we have seen, Rorty does not disagree with the historicist assumptions underlying these postmodern views—such historicist views are part of the redescriptive program he offers. What he emphasizes is that there are also useful elements in our tradition that can still serve human ends; whereas Foucault, as Rorty reads him, thinks that the tradition is already too corrupted by power to facilitate emancipation—that our disciplinary society is too far gone to become the liberal utopia Rorty envisages, the one that is capable of reducing cruelty. Foucault's defenders may take issue with Rorty here, but the details of that debate are not part of my present concerns. What claims my interest is Rorty's cause/justification distinction and his linguistic pragmatism, an approach to knowledge that takes our existing social practices to be the ground for knowledge—the only ground, as Rorty

[90] *CIS*, 65.

understands it, to be possible or necessary. Seen in this way, Rorty's main argument is with metaphysicians who seek to locate grounds in extra-linguistic (and/or nonhuman) structures. But in a related matter, talk about power, the sort of thing deconstructionists do, leads us back into talk about a distinction between appearance and reality as well as talk about the deepest level of the self—a privileged core to which a disciplinary society does damage. Understood in this way, even the postmodernist allies of Rorty fall back into the Given by treating power as a kind of universal in history that functions in the same way that philosophers such as Hegel think we see with the idea of Reason (and the accompanying notion of progress) in history.[91]

The issue above reflects a theoretical concern that Rorty has. It is a concern that Bernstein says Rorty has with metaphilosophical issues and it leads him to criticize the "metaphysical" thinking of both liberal theorists and antifoundationalists as well. Rorty connects his criticism of the nonliberal ironist to one of the overarching themes of his antifoundationalist treatment of knowledge: the correspondence theory of truth. Nonliberal ironists, just like liberal metaphysicians, get into to trouble when they fail to keep their analysis of knowledge, society, and the self within the realm of language. So, when it comes to politics, Rorty thinks that even ironists like Nietzsche fail to treat values and culture as just another text. When addressing political issues, Rorty tells us, Nietzsche "speaks as though he had a social mission."[92] By

[91] See Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998), 95. Rorty remarks: The ubiquity of Foucaldian power is reminiscent of the ubiquity of Satan, and thus of the ubiquity of original sin—that diabolical stain on every human soul. I argued in my first lecture that the repudiation of the concept of sin was at the heart of Dewey and Whitman's civic religion. I also claimed that the American Left, in its horror at the Vietnam War, reinvented sin. It reinvented the old religious idea that some stains are ineradicable. I now wish to say that, in committing itself to what it calls "theory," this Left has gotten something which is entirely too much like religion.

[92] *CIS*, 99. See also Nancy Fraser, "Michele Foucault: A 'Young Conservative,'?" *Ethics* vol. 96, no. 1 (Oct. 1985), 173. Fraser reads the young Foucault in a similar manner: "The spectacular growth and near-ubiquitous spread of these techniques amounted to a revolution in the very nature of power in modern culture. The operation of power was so thoroughly transformed as to render humanism irrelevant and *dépassé*."

separating private and public, Rorty thinks the liberal ironist will be able to take the same approach to politics that the novelist takes toward self-creation; however, she will realize that her redescriptions, although they have no rational grounds, can still serve as a model for others, since the best and most creative of these descriptions can show us new possibilities for choice. The key for the liberal ironist is not accurate description (e.g., what we get from the liberal theorist), but imagination (e.g., what we get from the novelist).

This is what the novelist does. Even though descriptions, for the ironist, are never true with respect to how things are, there is no reason why these descriptions will not be good enough to foster social solidarity. As evidence of the correctness of this antirepresentational approach, Rorty notes that even nonliberal ironists abandon their ironism when they start describing the effects of Western metaphysics on the socialized members of the culture. Nietzsche's will to power, in Rorty's reading of it, makes this mistake by presupposing a "reservoir" of "stuff" inside a person that serves as a kind of deepest level of the self that resists contingency.[93] Foucault, too, in his nonironist moments, is reluctant to admit that "there is no such thing as the 'language of the oppressed.'"[94] Such talk, in my reading of Rorty's nature/reason dualism, threatens to allow an "experience" to cross-over to the space of reasons. This would mean that, in some cases, propositional knowledge is related to the empirical content of our beliefs. In short, we might say that bridging the cause/justification divide would also permit a distinction between Truth and ideology—the latter being the ill-formed thoughts absorbed by the oppressed

[93] Ibid., 106. Nietzsche is critical of substance metaphysics and Rorty knows that his interpretation is attributing to Nietzsche a position that he would not wish to defend. I think this is Rorty's point. Rorty wants to keep his analysis in the realm of language and refrain from grounding his views in the Given. If the will to power is responsible for my belief then it (whatever it is) causes rather my freely chosen descriptions—a relation between a person to the nonhuman.
[94] Ibid., 64.

in an unjust society. When ironists speak this way, they seem to be taking, as Rorty frames the issue, a page out of the metaphysician's book.

In Rorty's account of justification, thought cannot bear on empirical reality (or vice-versa) since justification deals with statements that are located within the space of reasons. Once we make the shift from conceptual to propositional knowledge, we can think of justification as sentences we construct.[95] Ironists accept this most of the time. They know that our attempts to justify political principles are actually references we make to the settled linguistic conventions in our local communities and not to how things are in the world or to some extralinguistic, transcendent standard. But when they forget this, as Rorty thinks Nietzsche and Foucault do (even though only briefly), they become, not useful publically, but rather, they become publically dangerous. Ironists, of course, have social commitments; they are not all nihilists. But unlike metaphysicians, their commitments are not anchored in Rational principles. Their commitments are expressed in "metaphors" that evince awareness of their own contingency. Still, their goal is to be useful to their fellows, not in the private sphere as they cope with the contingency and finitude of human existence but in the public world as the set-about the task of making society less cruel. Here, the metaphors Rorty has in mind for the liberal ironist are not coping mechanisms, rather they are tools for social change.

[95] According to David McClean, William James said that truth is a "compliment we pay to sentences." I take this to be Rorty's position, if not because it tells how things really are, then because it seeks to prevent us from talking about truth and justification as if these are anything other than beliefs (or linguistic performances) about local practices that figure in our notion of justification. See, David McClean, "Richard Rorty and Cosmopolitan Hope: A Critical Analysis of Rorty's Ironism and Antifoundationalism and Consideration of Their Uses in Forging Cosmopolitan Sensibilities" PhD diss, The New School for Social Research of The New School, New York, ProQuest/UMI, 2009. (Publication No. 3355151), 54.

1.6 Ironism and Cruelty

The closest the liberal ironist comes to offering a "nonlinguistic," "noncontingent ground," occurs when she says, "cruelty is the worst thing we do."[96] This statement contains a central tenent of Rorty's liberalism that recognizes, presumably without justifying, that such an experience is terrible. Human beings are material creatures, and have the ability to experience pain. But here, such a recognition is not represented as crossing-over the nature/reason divide. Rorty borrows this definition of liberal from Judith Shklar, and he applies it to the experience of both physical and emotional pain. While there has been disagreement concerning the "metaphysical" presuppositions involved in this statement, Rorty does not see this as a metaphysical ground.[97] The last thing the ironist wants to do is provide a metaphysical ground or a privileged starting point. Her defense of the imperative to avoid cruelty is pragmatic.

Since one cannot cross over, as the metaphysician mistakenly thinks he can according to Rorty, the cause/justification divide (with a theory that synthesizes the private and public spheres), the ironist speaks about cruelty as a simple observation concerning practices already spoken about in "our" tradition. Since these are already being discussed in "our" society by others, people whom Rorty represents as already sharing many of the same beliefs (final vocabularies), he feels that this insight is as close to a noncircular starting point as we are capable of coming. These shared practices, once they are acquired through receptivity, can cause

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[96] *CIS*, xv.

[97] His critics argue that this is a detriment to his treatment of genuine moral choice See, for example, Charles Guignon and David Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality," in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990). See also, Richard Bernstein *The Pragmatic Turn*, 143. Bernstein explains that classical pragmatists, such as William James, would have been "unimpressed" with the reasons Rorty and Gustav Bergmann give for why "philosophers should make the linguist turn. He would have thought that it was downright perverse to advocate that philosophers *limit* themselves "to talk about the world by means of talking about a suitable language."

beliefs, but they cannot justify our statements.[98] The liberal ironist recognizes the "contingency" of these values, but she stands for them resolutely nevertheless.

But also implicit in what Rorty says is that, through new descriptions, the liberal ironist can do, for the public, what the public liberal incorrectly thinks requires a theory. Although Rorty recommends a therapeutic re-thinking of the "problems" associated with epistemological skepticism, he seems here to offer a reductionist view of social change: If we can replace correspondence to "reality" with descriptions, then we can focus on linguistic performances and truth and rationality "will take care of themselves."[99] He realizes, of course, that statements such as this sound suspiciously like those theoretical statements that privilege the Given. But Rorty maintains that he is not privileging cruelty in the sense that its empirical content yields a concept of justification. The conceptual norms are located in the linguistic practices into which we are socialized. Observational instances of actions we might think of as cruel stand only in causal relationships to my beliefs, there is nothing in what I observe that justifies my prohibitive attitude towards cruelty. Even if he is correct to say (correct in the sense that he has not committed the Naturalistic Fallacy by allowing a natural or physical property acquired through receptivity to justify his moral belief concerning "proper" treatment) that this is only a "starting point" in the sense that it is such a basic observation that it requires no further justification in the minds of most of us, avoiding cruelty does seem to be a starting point for Rorty. Moreover, it is

[98] In Chapter Six I discuss the idea of background knowledge in Heidegger and Taylor. Experiences, such as going to be hungry, would count as receptivity or sensory inputs for Rorty—causes of beliefs but not justifications for statements. The ideas of background knowledge and embeddedness in the lifeworld blur the distinction between theory and action. I think these ideas also call into question Rorty's sharp nature/reason dichotomy.
[99] *TP*, 71.

belief concerning our fellows that all of us (or many of us in liberal democratic societies) can *see* without recourse to philosophical argument.[100]

As a defense of his view, Rorty offers the following: For liberal ironists, he tells us, the question "Why not be cruel?" strikes them "as just as hopeless as the questions "Is it right to deliver *n* innocents over to be tortured to save the lives of $m \times n$ other innocents? If so, what are the correct values of *n* and *m*?"[101] These sorts of unanswerable questions are depicted by Rorty as part and parcel of the metaphysical tradition, replete with its desire for a noncircular ground. But since there is no "order beyond time" that determines the point of our existence, the best we can do is begin with what strikes us as cruel (given our current practices), and hence, as something we should avoid.

Those who find such an approach unsatisfying still think, according to Rorty, that our values need a more solid anchor. This line of thought is accompanied by the liberal metaphysician's conviction that our feelings need to be "bolstered by an argument."[102] But such considerations, in Rorty's eyes, take us back in the direction of a hoped for synthesis, or a reconciliation of the private and public spheres, that liberal theorists think will serve as the basis for an answer to the epistemological skeptic and the implications that such skepticism has for knowledge claims in ethics as well as in the natural sciences. The liberal metaphysician thinks social solidarity is impossible without something that connects our personal feelings to larger

[100] Jürgen Habermas thinks that there is more built into these sorts of judgments than what we can see and feel owing to the ways in which we have been socialized in our local communities (and apparently to what we can see although Rorty would think of this experience as a brute force impact from nature that merely cause beliefs as opposed to justifying them). Habermas thinks of these as underlying norms that have justificatory import and they point to a distinction, for Habermas, between universalistic morality and particularist ethics. See, Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 228.
[101] *CIS*, xv.
[102] Ibid., 91.

structures. These universal or rational structures are thought to be the things that separate valid or just statement from the bad ones in ways that are analogous to the true statements the realist defends.

Ironist theorists (as opposed to ironist novelists) also face a similar dilemma. They feel the tension between their desire for private self-creation and the goings on in the larger public sphere in which they find themselves. It is here, Rorty explains, that we see an important difference between theorists and novelists. Theorists differ from novelists in that the former are not content to show "how to arrange little things. They also want to describe a big thing."[103] Novelists are free to redescribe people in their writing; whereas, the writing of theorists depends on inherited vocabularies that are "linked dialectically" to one another. Rorty, of course, does not maintain that an actual link exists in the sense that a realist might use the word. There is no real substance nor does the study of history show us that our knowledge is moving closer to the truth. What there is, I think Rorty would say, and he does express an affinity to Heidegger on this score, is that there is a logic at work (dialectic) in the sense that the conversation we theorists have been engaged in leads to discourse about things in themselves. Moreover, this conversation leads to the conviction that our "realist intuitions" must be more than simply the result of a conviction whose real cause is located in our discourse rather than in the nature of things.[104]

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[103] *CIS*, 100.

[104] But, as I am arguing, if this conviction is not located in the logical space of nature, but rather it is found among the justifications that have been instilled in us linguistically through our socialization processes, then the metaphysical insecurities and the psychological needs (theoretical concepts that assume the existence of physical, human biological givens that enable things like psychological needs to develop in the first place), are the things that exist on both sides of Rorty's nature/reason dualism. In other words, the world does not justify our beliefs, but it does, apparently, trick us into thinking that external realism is true. If this is the case, then is not our criticism of the cause/justification *justified* by the world in the sense that human biology causes me to feel the need for something true that is greater than me? An understanding of the human condition does not justify our beliefs concerning truth, but it does justify our beliefs about the irrelevancy of representationalist epistemology and the insistence that

There are reasons to think, Rorty explains, that something like this leads to some the distinctions that Nietzsche felt compelled to offer. If we look at Nietzsche's subject, for example, it is not the novelist's individual person for him. Nietzsche's subject, Rorty observes, is a "big person" named "Europe." And the theorist's narrative is not a "chance collection" of people he happened to bump into during his life, as were the people in the novels of an ironist writer like Proust. For the theorist, the historical record provides the details of his story.

This is how Rorty accounts for contingency and necessity. In the big picture, there is no necessity or natural progression; i.e., ironist theory is not progress toward a goal. But since the theorist's subject is metaphysics, and because he is conscious of his own contingency as he weighs in on philosophical controversies, he realizes, as Rorty stresses in Nietzsche's case, that he "cannot afford to be too Apollonian."[105] There is no Rational, universal, or fixed point from which he can survey "philosophical progression." But as an ironist, he experiences the tension that the demands of theory and ironism impose on him. The ironist, Rorty maintains, wants to say that the demands of self-creation have produced just one more possibility to actualize; but, as a finite being, he recognizes that this process is never complete. Still, as a theorist who has inherited the presuppositions of Western metaphysics (the will to truth), he wants to say that "he has actualized the last possibility left open" by the tradition. Nietzsche's "Thus I willed it" is easier for the novelist than the theorist not because the world is that way but because their subjects are different. What we need, Rorty argues, is to become comfortable talking about the public realm without trying to make our talk anything more than the result of our own

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empiricism is still useful for us in that it can clarify and defend a picture of philosophy in which a connection between mind and world is still a part of our conception of truth.

[105] *CIS*, 108.

idiosyncratic preferences. What's more, when we see that private and public are no more in "need of synthesis than are paintbrushes and crowbars," we will be on the way to accepting that descriptions of how things seem to us is really all we need.[106] Now that we have looked at how Rorty proposes to dissolve rather than solve the epistemological skepticism in our inherited tradition, I turn now to an examination of one of the central issues underlying his linguistic pragmatism: the cause/justification distinction.

[106] Ibid., xiv.

CHAPTER 2

RECONCILIATION AND THE CAUSE/JUSTIFICATION DISTINCTION

The cause/justification distinction accepts that there is a difference between the natural world that contains rocks, birds, and people, and the space of reasons where we justify our beliefs. If we stray too far to the side that contains the physical entities that make-up the content of our empirical beliefs, we get theories of knowledge that become materialistic or scientistic. If, on the other hand, we drift to the opposite extreme, if we try to avoid privileging talk of the material world, we risk falling into a version of idealism. The conscious embrace of language, here seen as vocabularies in Rorty (or language as our natural home in the hermeneutical tradition), presents potential difficulties for the latter "idealist" view. In Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example, we see that "language is not just one of man's possessions in the world; rather on it depends the fact that man has a *world* at all. The world as world exists for man as for no other creature that is in the world. But this world is verbal in nature."[107] The cause/justification distinction leads to a potential dualism between nature and reason that has the potential to make talk of one or the other of the two sides mentioned above look mysterious.

John McDowell's solution is to re-introduce friction into our interpretations by reconstructing empiricism. But scientistic or biologistic talk also has the potential to introduce friction into our interpretations. This friction, the sort that comes from Darwinian and logical positivist perspectives, represents the "bald naturalism" that McDowell opposes. In fact, McDowell argues that Rorty, in spite of embracing a coherentist view of knowledge that severs

[107] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheirmer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 1989), 443.

the connection between mind and world, actually does think that Darwin describes reality better than anyone else—a charge that Rorty "stoutly" denies.[108]

Part of the problem concerns the nature/reason dualism with respect to the different disciplines we acknowledge in our academic institutions. As Richard Bernstein explains, there is a potential problem built into this dichotomy that is frequently overlooked. We know what we are talking about when we talk about literature and the humanities, but in talking about society, it is not clear if we are talking about nature or reason (or what most people would probably say is a combination of both). We might situate Proust on the side of reason and language in the sense that he creates descriptions that could become compelling for some interpreters. But where do we place physics, economics, political science, history and sociology? According to Bernstein,

> In the Anglo-American tradition, intellectual disciplines fall into the trichotomy of the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, but on the Continent they are categorized according to the dichotomy between the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften* (the expression that was introduced into German as a translation for what Mill called the "moral sciences").[109]

If we do have an unbridgeable gap between causes and justifications, is it correct then to say that the nature/reason duality applies equally to both physics and poetry? Yet, Bernstein suggests that thinkers on the Continent may not even be addressing physics when they discuss the *Naturwissenschaften* and the *Geisteswissenschaften*. I would like to see theorists provide a little more clarity. Certainly what they say may apply to all three disciplines, but such a perspective requires an argument. If we apply an analysis of language and knowledge—one that was originally produced in the interpretation of a poem or a painting—to physics, biology, or

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[108] *TP*, 152.
[109] Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 35.

sociology without accounting for the possibility that the physical world (the subject dealt with by the natural sciences) may be a part of my interpretation (in ways that it is not when dealing with poetry), then the dichotomous distinction may not produce the same results, for external realist claims, that the trichotomous distinction is repudiated to do in the analytical tradition. In other words, physics may not be about the world any more than poetry, but very few theorists actually make this claim.

In my view, theorists have been too quick to shift to an analysis of moral or scientific knowledge, one that substitutes a word for a thing, as if talk about the latter can always be dropped, on "therapeutic" grounds, without losing anything. We can, of course, stress that a scientific theory is "better" if it passes muster with experts in the surrounding, relevant, community (narrative creations can be evaluated similarly without talking about correspondence to reality). However, the word better is key. That we need only report on what other humans regard as better without talking about states of affairs in the external world, is one of the central issue present in Rorty's critique of traditional epistemology. And describing states of affairs, thought to be mind-independent, seems like one the things that make statements plausible in the first place. To be sure, such talk about correct representation can be dropped but perhaps not always and not without losing something significant (such as realist intuitions). This is what I think Rorty does, and I also find that much of his work is an attempt to convince us that we really have not lost anything important when we drop correspondence. But as Bernstein observes, in the Continental tradition, the attempt to get at a problem linguistically may not have implications for the physical sciences in the sense that the theorist was never actually attempting to substitute a word for a thing in the first place.

The cause/justification distinction is an important part of Rorty's argument concerning the idea of reconciliation—the attempt to synthesize the private and public realms. He argues that the Western philosophical tradition contains attempts, by various foundationalist thinkers, to ground political principles and synthesize or reconcile the tension between the private and public spheres—Marxism being the last great, failed, attempt to do this. The solution, and the lesson Rorty draws, is to stop trying to ground political principles, to dispense with the attempt to bring subject and object back together again. This leads Rorty to go even further in his critique of knowledge than do the radically historicist accounts we find in French postmodernism. Rorty's linguistic pragmatism holds that theory is irrelevant to politics, or, as Thomas McCarthy puts it, Rorty creates an "absolute split between a depoliticized theory and a detheorized politics."[110]

But unlike some of his fellow critics of Enlightenment metaphysics, there is a "deep and persistent humanism," as Bernstein puts it, in Rorty's thought that is characteristic of his life and work in spite of his criticism of the value of theory in political life.[111] For Rorty, this deep commitment can be maintained without providing illumination, at the theoretical level, for the idea that our views are justified by how things really are in the external world. But in my view, if we embrace such an outlook, we will be unable to criticize ideological assertions with reference to anything other than the linguistic or conversational constraints imposed on us by our fellows.[112] A view such as mine, in Rorty's eyes, evinces a latent realist fantasy that our words somehow manage to throw their hooks around real "things" that exist in a mind-independent world; as such, this view presents human knowledge claims as being right with respect, not to

[110] Thomas McCarthy, "Private Irony and Public Decency: Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 16, no. 2 (Winter 1990), 366.
[111] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 201.
[112] Ibid., 134.

other speakers, but with respect to how things are. But in my view, Rorty's approach leaves no room for the empirical content of our beliefs to stand in a justificatory relationship to our beliefs. The world, he maintains, can cause us to hold beliefs, but it can never justify us in holding them. His arguments against reconciliation contain also his metatheoretical views about language, representation, and justification.

Rorty's conviction, and it is one that I do not share, is that such reconciliation is neither possible nor necessary. As such, he holds that our moral and political values will serve their purposes just fine, even if we cannot provide grounds for those values. Rorty's argument relies on a distinction that has deep roots in both analytical and continental philosophy: the cause/justification distinction. There is, Rorty maintains, an important distinction we should make between the cause for holding a belief and the justification we produce for the truth of that belief. As Rorty understands it, the only warrant possible (or necessary) for the statements we intend to count as truth claims is to be found in the settled convictions of a particular, local, linguistic community. Philosophers in the past had made the mistake of thinking that there was something special about the human ability to reflect on the contents of their conscious minds. To say that we have an "idea," and that it is immediately present before our minds, leads to the belief that unmediated access to the world is possible by getting straight on how either consciousness (Descartes) or receptivity (Locke and the British-empiricists) work. And in a related move, principles thought to have regulatory or critical force presuppose grounds that are believed, incorrectly in Rorty's view, to either (1) transcend local, historical communities, or (2) to be justified empirically, by theories that presuppose knowledge of how things really are in

reality. To view the lay of the land in the antifoundationalist terms Rorty recommends, is to see human practices as creations and not as finalities that are in need of justification.

But justification may still be possible. To be sure, whatever conception of justification we defend as plausible, it will not be one that gives us access to a fixed realm of Being (Plato) or to non-conceptual, empirical knowledge (unmediated access to things thought to simply "jump" into the human mind in order to be known, introspectively, in and of themselves). But saying this does not entail acceptance of the Rortyean idea that the only constraints on our interpretations are the conversational restraints we find in the contingent language-games we play. There may still be ways to speak of knowledge without falling back into the Given (the idea that receptivity gives us access to unmediated things in themselves). If we can speak plausibly about knowledge in a way that does not place the world on one side of a divide and justification on the other, then perhaps we will be able to see our way clear to saying that a private/public synthesis is both possible and necessary—that theory still has something of value to contribute to our society's "conversation" concerning how we order our lives together. But it is this conviction that Rorty argues lies at the heart of the problem—the attempt to ground our values, rationally, leads to the creation of metaphysical theories that, in the final analysis, are attempts to ground humanist principles in non-linguistic "truths" thought to exist either in human beings (at the deepest level of the self) or in the nature of reality outside of us (in universal structures available to reason).

2.1 Realism and Ideology

Reconciliation, Rorty notes, is an old issue in philosophy that goes back to Plato's distinction between appearance and reality in his allegory of the cave. In the contemporary period, a similar infatuation surfaced as philosophers became (Rorty says briefly) enamored with the attempt by Hegel and Marx to effect a similar type of synthesis. If the thing preventing human emancipation has something to do with understanding how things are (whether one thinks of the surrounding world as the product of mental or physical labor), then confining our analysis to the settled convictions, extant in our present society (as Rorty does), will not permit a rational distinction between truth and ideology. But Marxists, according to Rorty, only thought they had succeeded in synthesizing the private and public through a materialist theory of labor that would enable human beings to draw clear distinctions between "brainwashing, media hype," and "false consciousness."[113] The way things are never actually makes us right. For Rorty, the belief that it does is of a piece with a desire for a "fierce father" or a God—something that falls on both sides of the cause/justification gap. This something that is thought of as "real," is something that foundationalists hope will serve as the standard, something "real" about which we can speak that has nothing to do with the socialization processes that constitute the logical space of reasons where linguistic descriptions are generated. If these descriptions can be produced with respect to nothing other than the settled linguistic performances we inherit (and observe around us), then the only real check on political power (or exploitation of the working class), comes in the form of the willingness of others to "speak" critically about these practices. But if these statements

[113] Rorty argues that this sort of knowledge is a goal of metaphysicians (and post-metaphysical theorists who are sympathetic to the Enlightenment), because it enables us (they argue) to make statements about external reality—what Rorty calls "the way things really are" and distinguish between good and bad arguments. See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 3, 48.

are not directed at the world (or if the world does not impinge rationally on what we believe), then the friction, whether one opposes or defends the status quo, comes from what we "say" and not from what we experience.

But for some of Rorty's critics, saying that the world can justify is not tantamount to falling back into the Given. One need not advance the view that exploitation violates a law of nature or some view of the self that harkens back to the existence of a Cartesian "soul substance" inside, at the deepest level of our Being, in order to condemn cruelty in a way that has more bite to it than Rorty's notion of the settled linguistic convictions has. Such a view, as McDowell sees it, is already contained in the work of Marx and Gadamer. "For Marx," he explains, "a properly human life is nothing if not active: it involves the productive making over of 'nature, the sensuous exterior world.'" Gadamer's account of a "merely animal life" coincides with Marx's account of the dehumanizing effects of alienated labor, although, as McDowell writes, Gadamer himself "does not note the parallel."[114] Through *Bildung* (education), sensibility becomes more than the merely non-conceptual physical impacts as analyzed in the Sellarsian/Rortyean employment of the Myth of the Given. The back and forth between nature and reason (causes and justifications) takes place within a human animal predisposed to conceptual capacities. There are reasons to think, as McDowell explains, that, although we cannot defend seventeenth-century conceptions of human nature, we can say that enculturation (through education) results in a second nature and that this results from the interplay between mind and world. Exploitation on this account does commit violence against the person on the material level, and it is connected to our ongoing life-processes in which we achieve rationality and autonomy. Human beings,

[114] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 117.

conceived of in this manner, are material/biological beings who assimilate the external world. Rorty's cause/justification makes it appear that human beings assimilate only books.

In saying this we are, of course, oversimplifying Rorty's position. However, there is a grain of truth to it. If we are not answerable to the world, rationally, then we are left to answer only to other human beings. And Rorty does defend this position. As such, McDowell's talk about exploitation as being some sort of transgression at the biological or worldly level, commits, in Rorty's view, the same mistake we see committed by theorists who attempt a reconciliation by making us answerable (falling back into the Given) to the world or to rational structures embedded in reason and communication.

What seems important to me, although this is a separate issue that I will not address in this dissertation, is that societies reproduce themselves through material labor and organized action, not through the narrative creation—the activity of novelists and poets—that Rorty praises so much in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.[115] Rorty is not averse to talking about the material structures "necessary" for life, but he is not willing to call them necessary in a theoretical sense of the word nor to say that they justify any of our conclusions based on empirical analysis of the content of our beliefs. Richard Bernstein explains, following Jürgen Habermas, that these requirements for life can be seen in reconstructions of Kantian theories that combine a "detranscendentalized Kant with [Charles] Darwin." Normative claims here become not necessary concepts, but rather "unavoidable" presuppositions about social life and our moral commitments, assumptions that we see in operation "from the perspective of participants in the

[115] I will discuss Jürgen Habermas, Thomas McCarthy and David Hoy in Chapter 5. I do find Habermas's distinction between aesthetic and communicative reason as well as the differences between the two spheres of rationalization in which these develop to be instructive.

lifeworld."[116] This is where Rorty's linguistic theory inserts itself. Statements such as these presuppose a belief in external realism. Whatever critique one offers of a theory concerning labor, consciousness, and the material structures of society, Rorty's version of pragmatism attempts to recast it in linguistic rather than material terms (i.e., material in the sense that the empirical content of our beliefs rationally impinge on what we regard as a justification for our statements about states of affairs in the social world). The main reason for such a move, as I am arguing in this dissertation, stems from Rorty's metaphilosophical commitments: the avoidance of correspondence. And it is through this linguistic pragmatism, one that focuses on practices in order to dissolve rather than solve problems, that we see how the tension between (a) the Given and (b) the threat that avoiding metaphysics will also lead to a form of linguistic idealism that cuts us off from the external world are handled by Rorty. As stated previously, Rorty sees this new approach as one that offers a therapeutic re-thinking of the tradition that avoids all hints of correspondence.

2.2 Justification and Tools for Problem Solving

In order to connect our belief to the thing that justifies it, we need to have at least some certainty that these things are actually connected. But how much certainty is required? If the building in the field behind my office is torn down in the morning and a prefabricated storage unit is erected in its place (unbeknownst to me), I have what appears to be a justified, true belief; I believe that there is a building in the field and indeed there is. However, the thing that justified my belief is not the actual building that currently sits in the field behind my office. The question

[116] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 171.

arises: How certain do we need to be about the relationship between truth and justification? Is there any important difference between the ideas of a necessary connection and one that is highly probable (or, in Habermas's language, a presupposition that is necessary versus one that is merely unavoidable)? Rorty does not quibble over distinctions such a necessary versus unavoidable. Yet, it seems correct to say that for Rorty, metaphysicians are the ones who are after absolutes. The contrast he sets-up is one between the contingency of language and the desire for the aforementioned absolutes: universals and things-in-themselves—essences thought to give us unmediated access to how things are. Since the only realm to which we have access is the one he associates with language (the side of the cause/justification divide that Kant thinks of as conceptual as opposed to the other side of the duality that provides our intuitions or sensory impressions), our words, then, are never about anything more than other words. This idea enables Rorty to charge his opponents with a desire to find a "neutral" language thought to permit one—mistakenly thought to permit one—to speak about how things really are.

In calling these "vocabularies," Rorty shifts the argument from introspection and empirical thinking to what he calls "epistemological behaviorism."[117] I think this idea can be read as a form of pragmatism since pragmatists, as is their wont traditionally, warn against rationalistic theories that mistakenly view knowledge as having something to do with essences. Here the idea of an essence surfaces, in Rorty's hands, as the idea of a Cartesian soul—the thing that makes each of us special. In the present context, the idea of second nature, as conceived by McDowell, becomes something akin to a metaphysical essence, albeit a less objectionable conception of human nature in Rorty's eyes, but nevertheless, such talk so conceived is of a

[117] *PMN*, 98-127; *CIS*, 48.

piece with the epistemological skeptic's goal to close the gap between mind and world by seeing truth as connected to some "real" part of a person that is not subject to the contingency of language.

In using terms such as final vocabularies, Rorty advances the idea (or possibly begs the question in favor of the idea) that linguistic redescription, and not answerability to the world, is the proper means through which to continue the conversation about knowledge and values. Focusing on universal rational structures embedded in language, as well as the world-directedness of thought, prevents us from focusing on social practices (final vocabularies) and side-stepping the dead-end debate concerning grounds. But philosophers, such as Thomas McCarthy, see something else at work. He thinks Rorty's linguistic redescription is of a piece with the historicist accounts of the "end of the subject" advanced by postmodernist theorists. But Rorty, while agreeing with post-Nietzscheans such as Heidegger and Derrida, parts ways with them in wanting to retain the "social fruits of the Enlightenment heritage, albeit without the conceptual garnishings."[118] Rorty's propensity to couch conscious reflection (the testimony of introspection so important to subject/object epistemology for both rationalist and empiricist) in terms of "vocabularies" has a dual effect: It simultaneously makes Rorty's account both concrete and abstract. It is concrete in that we are, in Heidegger's sense, Being-in-the-world rather than Cartesian essences or thinking things.[119] But it is also "abstract" in that it allows Rorty to speak

[118] Thomas McCarthy, "Private Irony and Public Decency: Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism," 367.
[119] See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 79. Heidegger says, "Of course Being-in-the-world is a state of Dasein which is necessary *a priori*, but it is far from sufficient for completely determining Dasein's Being. Before making these three phenomena the themes for special analyses, we shall attempt by way of orientation to characterize the third of these factors. What is meant by '*Being-in*'"? The care-structure, which characterizes Dasein's concerful Being-in-the-world, points to the significance of Dasien's throwness and the variety of experiences it is capable of having due to the care-structure and the ways in which we are related to the entities in the world that we encounter. In a footnote, Macquarrie explains the

in the third person about language, politics, and the moral cares and concerns we have as if these things become issues only after we produce linguistic justifications.[120] In short, McCarthy thinks Rorty's neohistoricist and relativistic account of knowledge, one that focuses on the particular, changeable, and contingent, is prosecuted in a language that already contains concepts thought to be universal and necessary.

McCarthy also thinks, as Rorty does not, that our statements require justification that goes beyond the linguistic practices of the local, contingent community. Yet, following Habermas, McCarthy does not see his version of pragmatism as one that violates the imperatives of a lifeworld-centered approach to knowledge, that is, a conception of truth and justification that falls back into the Myth of the Given. Communication theorists understand themselves to be located within the logical space of reasons. In this manner, their critique of knowledge references "unavoidable" linguistic presuppositions that come into being every time we humans

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importance of the concept of experience in Heidegger and the ways in which he tries to capture the meaning of "'Die 'Erlebnisse' dieses 'Lebens'…' in English. "The connection between 'Leben ('life') and 'Erlebnisse' ('Experiences') is lost in translation. An 'Erlebnis' is not just any 'experience' ('Erfahrung'), but one which we feel deeply and 'live through'. We shall translate 'Erlebnis' and 'erleben' by 'Experience' with a capital 'E', reserving 'experience' for 'Erfahrung' and 'erfahren'. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* 72. Heidegger, in my view, would regard Rorty's use of "vocabularies" as one that already evinces concernful Being-in-the-world. Dasein is not primarily a being that strives for one type of knowledge (absolute certainty) and, given that this sort of knowledge is impossible, turns instead to linguistic redescription as a tool to cope with a "reality" that we construct. Heidegger's student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, builds on his analytic of Dasein, and provides an account of what Dasein does in the world. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 443. Gadamer says that "man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic." However, I do not see this as the same sort of concept we find in Rorty. Gadamer, in my view, is not distancing himself from Heidegger's analytic, but rather, he is proving a positive account of what Dasein does in the world. Rorty's "vocabularies" do the same thing—they show us how we might proceed on an ordinary, everyday basis, but his idea of linguistic redescription also serves as an argument against subject/object metaphysics (even though Rorty says he does not have a linguistic theory). I think this is an important difference between Rorty's use of language and the uses of language in Heidegger and Gadamer. I also think it underlies the difference with respect to talk of moods and feeling (an issue I will address this issue below).

[120] See Charles Guignon and David Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality." Rorty's third-person descriptions function as a sort of disembodied perspective that enables him to criticize theories that presume to speak about how things are, while, at the same time, taking an objective, third-person stance towards his own values as if the presuppositions underlying his values require no grounding. But the idea in question concerns exactly what it is we do when we produce justifications. If justifications are never anything more than linguistic because, in saying this, we are producing a linguistic justification, could there ever be a tighter circle than that?

get together to do things. As such, the material does not pass unimpeded into our conscious minds, but as we talk about whatever it is we are calling the "real" world, we make use of linguistic presuppositions that we all share and without which communication would not even be possible. These do not tell us what is actually true, but like Kant's antinomies, they are represented as necessary (or unavoidable) communicative presuppositions. This idea of background knowledge is a subject that Charles Taylor argues Rorty fails to acknowledge as he focuses on propositional knowledge. Taken together, what I think we see here is the criticism that Rorty's linguistic theory remains trapped within the representationalist framework it intends to leave behind.

2.3 Normativity and Subject-Centered Philosophy of Consciousness

One of Rorty's frequent targets is the testimony of conscious introspection. McCarthy too, following Jürgen Habermas, recognizes the limits of conscious introspection and the philosophy of the subject. However, McCarthy (as well as John Searle, Charles Taylor, and John McDowell, all of whom I treat below), thinks it is important to retain some of reason's power to reflect and draw conclusions that are valid with respect to an objective world—the inability to bridge the cause/justification divide threatens to leave us with a picture of justification that makes a mockery out of realist intuitions. The perceived threat, the result of taking the settled linguistic conventions in our local communities as the only norm available, animates the critiques of both McCarthy and McDowell. But for McCarthy, Rorty's treatment of norms as containing anything other than the conventions already extant in a local community, threatens to expose us to an unacceptable form of relativism. Rorty's post-Nietzschean, linguistic

historicism, McCarthy explains, differs significantly from previous theories that refuse to regard the testimony of introspection as a form of linguistified subjectivity:

> The accent here certainly falls differently than in models of social practice without a subject, where the determining factors are language, tradition, society, power relations, structures, rules, or the like. Garfinkel's thicker description of making sense in everyday settings, with its emphasis on the agent's own practical reasoning, brings the subject back into social practice. The idealizing supposition of rationally accountable subjects figures in turn in the idealizing supposition of an independent reality known in common: competent subjects are expected to deal with conflicts of experience and testimony in ways that themselves presuppose and thus reconfirm, the intersubjective availability of an objectively real world….Any adequate account of our practices of truth will have to attend not only to the situated, socially conditioned character of concrete truth claims and of the warrants offered for them, but to the situation-transcending import of the claims themselves. While we have no idea of standards of truth wholly independent of particular languages and practices, "truth" nevertheless functions as an "idea of reason" with respect to which we can criticize not only particular claims within our language but the very standards of truth we have inherited.[121]

Rorty's use of the idea of linguistic redescription contains these antifoundationalist ideas concerning the limits of reason and personal introspection. McCarthy, above, references rational presuppositions built into communication. In the passages below, we will see how Searle and McDowell think it is essential for a sound theory of knowledge to retain, on the part of a socialized individual, the ability—on the part of a rational person—to speak about a real, mind-independent world. For Searle, this means that human minds are not, entirely, the result of social construction and, for McDowell, it will mean that some form of empiricism is still necessary for the construction of a plausible account of what rational agents do, in the world, as they speak about how things seem.

The theorists I treat in this this dissertation can be described as naturalists. However, they think that reason still has a role to play in moral and social criticism. Rorty's unbridgeable

[121] Thomas McCarthy, "Private Irony and Public Decency: Richard Rorty's New Pragmatism," 369.

divide between causes and justifications comes to be understood by them as bridgeable, or, rather, as I will argue in this dissertation, more porous than Rorty is willing to allow, and, as a result, it turns out to be a "divide" that allows both universalist (McCarthy) and empirical (McDowell) claims to seep into what Rorty wants to regard as linguistic justification alone.

Rorty's approach can also be described as a form of naturalistic philosophy, but it is one that focuses, consciously, on language, in an antifoundationalist critique of knowledge that he understands to proceed, concretely, free of the metaphysical presuppositions contained within epistemology-centered philosophy prior to the Linguistic Turn in philosophy. In particular, the idea of representation, in Rorty, is directly connected to Wilfrid Sellars's idea of the Myth of the Given, which grows out of Sellars's reading of Hegel and the analysis we find of sense certainty in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[122] As Sellars explains:

> I PRESUME that no philosopher who has attacked the philosophical idea of givenness or, to use the Hegelian term, immediacy has intended to deny that there is a difference between *inferring* that something is the case and, for example, *seeing* it to be the case. If the term "given" referred merely to what is observed as being observed, or, perhaps, to a proper subset of the things we are said to determine by observation, the existence of "data" would be as noncontroversial as the existence of philosophical perplexities. But, of course, this just is not so. The phrase "the given" as a piece of professional—epistemological—shoptalk carries a substantial theoretical commitment, and one can deny that there are "data" or that anything is, in this sense, "given" without flying in the face of reason.
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> Many things have been said to be "given": sense contents, material objects, universals, propositions, real connections, first principles, even givenness itself. And there is, indeed, a certain way of construing the situations philosophers analyze in these terms which can be said to be the framework of givenness. This framework has been a common feature of most of the major systems of philosophy, including, to use a Kantian turn of phrase, both "dogmatic rationalism" and "skeptical empiricism". It has, indeed, been so pervasive that few, if any, philosophers have been altogether free of it; certainly not Kant, and, I would argue, not even Hegel, that great foe of "immediacy". Often what is

[122] See Yury Selivanov, "The 'Myth of the Given': The Hegelian Meditations of Wilfrid Sellars," *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* vol. 26, no. 4 (2012), 681.

> attacked under its name are only specific varieties of "given." Intuited first principles and synthetic necessary connections were the first to come under attack. And many who today attack "the whole idea of givenness"—and they are an increasing number—are really only attacking sense data.[123]

In Rorty's thought, this means that givenness rests on a foundation of noninferential, non-verbal awareness—a prejudice Rorty seeks to displace with his ideas of linguistic redescription and final vocabularies. Whether we are talking about our own personal feelings or our belief that an objective world impinges rationally on our beliefs, the attack on the Given in Sellars is continued by Rorty. In his linguistic pragmatism, the Given is treated as one way that our community has spoken about "reality"—linguistic descriptions that can be replaced with other descriptions since justification requires only the appeal to the social. As Bernstein and Habermas note, Rorty replaces objectivity with solidarity.[124]

Sellars had already explained the consequences of givenness for knowledge in the following manner:

A. *X senses red sense content s* entails *x noninferentially knows that s is red*.

B. The ability to sense sense contents is unacquired.

C. The ability to know facts of the form *x is* Φ is acquired. [125]

And Sellars continues:

> I have already noted that sense-data theorists are impressed by the question "How can a physical object look red to S, unless something in that situation *is* red and S is taking account of it? If S isn't experiencing something red, how does it happen that the physical object looks *red*, rather than green or streaky?" There is, I propose to show *something* to this line of thought, though the story turns out to be a complicated one."[126]

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[123] Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 13-14.
[124] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 176.
[125] Sellars, 21.
[126] Ibid., 46-47.

If we pay attention to the difference between concepts and Rorty's idea of final vocabularies, what we see in Sellars appears to point to a distinction between the way the world is, and the way in which it gets represented to us. McDowell argues below that we should not think of perceptual knowledge as if there is a "screen" between what we are aware of and the external world that contains the facts that manifest these to us. The world revealed to us is an objective world, but contra Rorty, its thinkable contents are not made manifest through the *sui generis* language-games we play in the logical space of reasons. He understands empirical knowledge as already imbued with concepts.[127]

Although Sellars includes among the Given "sense contents, material objects, universals," and "first principles," he does not label them "sentence-shaped chunks called 'facts'" as does Rorty.[128] In Rorty's linguistified subjectivity, material objects as well as universals are treated, not only as given, but as words. As Rorty explains,

> The "subjectivity" and "unscientific" character of introspective reports are thus no more philosophically significant than the defects of spectroscopes. Once "subjective reports" are seen as a matter of heuristic convenience, rather than of permitting someone's unsupported word to refute a promising scientific hypothesis, we can clear away the unfortunate associations of introspectionist

[127] When Rorty treats vocabularies as products of cultural language-games, we see an analysis that reads like a continuation of Thomas Kuhn's work on the idea of paradigms. But when Rorty turns to specific, individual descriptions, when he talks about a person's final vocabulary, understanding is not a happening in the Gadamerian sense, it is a conscious redescription of an interpreted "reality" in the Nietzschean sense, one in which the individual chooses to redescribe states of affairs in ways she finds more edifying. If this latter account is correct, Rorty is describing a process that looks more like the political spin we see partisans proffering in political debates than a rational attempt to speak about an objective world. And Rorty would agree: the world causes but does not justify our views. Still, he distances himself from the views of Nietzsche and Foucault with respect to power and its influence over our "sincere" attempts to speak about and pursue what we think is good for others in our social world. Rorty respects the "earnest seeker after truth." However, any analysis that holds that such earnestness must be connected to normative concerns that understand the idea of good to be more than a free choice of descriptions would be seen, by Rorty, as an attempt to bridge the cause/justification divide. For a detailed discussion of normativity, paradigms, and the insider's perspective (or the field linguist who is what I would call an outsider) see, McDowell, *Mind and World*, 129-161.

[128] Rorty, *CIS*, 5-6.

> psychology with rationalism's appeal to clear and distinct ideas and Protestantism's appeal to the individual conscience.
>
> I conclude that the Quinean and Sellarsian arguments I have outlined in the preceding chapter also serve to clear psychology of the standard suspicions which empiricistic and physicalistic philosophers have brought against it. The suspicions which come from the other direction—from the need to preserve human uniqueness, free will, and the integrity of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.[129]

Rorty's emphasis on practices (and linguistic performances) places him at odds with theories that give special credence to these inner psychological episodes. These realist intuitions surface, in Rorty's analysis, along with the desire for metaphysical comfort, as intuitions that ultimately tell us nothing about Truth—not in a correspondence sense nor in a logical sense such as we see in Habermas. It is also worth noting that Quine is also criticized by Rorty for thinking that the language of physics has priority over the language of things such as poetry. It appears that the idea of a vocabulary, as employed by Rorty, has deflationary effects on an individual's self-understanding in just the same way that a paradigm shift does for our understanding of scientific knowledge. But in the view I am offering, these two should not be conflated. Scientific terms do have meaning because of the larger social/scientific language-game. Words such as "phlogiston" are not correct in the sense that they describe an actually existing fluid. Moreover, when the language-game changes, the "substance" phlogiston disappears leading to the conclusion that it never existed in the first place.[130]

Sellars does not appear to be saying that the Given is nothing more than a linguistic creation, even though, like Rorty, he seems to agree that our relation to "external reality" cannot be characterized in terms that are more intimate than the mere causal relations Rorty describes

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[129] *PMN*, 219.
[130] See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996), 52-60.

above.[131] Still, if we look at Sellars's three categories, the three theses mentioned above, we see, as Yury Selivanov explains, that these are not taken by Sellars "as a substantial and consistent theory as a whole but only partially." Standing out, in terms of significance for the possibility of empirical knowledge, is the immediacy thesis (givenness). In light of the immediacy thesis, as employed by Sellars, the Given comes to be seen, not as providing knowledge of how things are, but rather, as sense-data already mediated by concepts. But by itself, the critique of immediacy does not entail either (1) a non-realist position, nor does it point to (2) the impossibility of experiential knowledge. At times, Rorty tends to talk as if every instance of private introspection (reflection upon the contents of one's conscious mind) is an attempt to gain knowledge of how things are through an analysis of isolated conscious introspection. He does, of course, insist that he, as with any other person, reserves the right to talk about introspection as long as we do not attribute justificatory significance to such testimony. But as Taylor argues, Rorty's analysis of language, meaning, and the conceptual framework within which we operate, evinces the same dichotomy between the inside world to which we have private access, and the outside material

[131] See Dieter Freundlieb, "Zeitschrift für allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie" *Journal for General Philosophy of Science* vol. 18, no. 1/2 (1987), 111. Freundlieb thinks that Marin Heidegger does not hold a linguistic nominalist view of reality: "Heidegger's life-long struggle was to overcome what he called the 'forgottenness of Being' that has characterized Western metaphysics since the ancient Greeks first asked the question of being. While his early work in *Being and Time* (1927) can still be interpreted as a widening of the conceptual horizon of a Kantian transcendentalism, his later work was definitely intended as a departure from any form of foundationalist epistemology in terms of the traditional dualisms of subject and object, constitution and the constituted, and the knower and the known. According to Heidegger, the main question for philosophy is not, and should never have been, how a 'worldless' subject can come to know the external world, that is to say, how two forever distinct modes of being can come together in a relation of representation. Heidegger's philosophy is meant to go beyond both realism and idealism. So what he sets out to show is that Dasein (There-Being) implies that we are always already in the world and that the world is disclosed through language. But this does not mean that language has anything like an instrumental function. If Being-in the-world is substituted for the Kantian transcendental ego, then the things-in themselves…become linguistic without thereby becoming *purely* linguistic." In my view, this means that experience is still important for Heidegger as it is for American pragmatists. But the tendency, and this is what I am arguing we see in Rorty, is to ignore this important distinction between treating an idea as linguistic, or getting at it, consciously, through language, and treating an idea or a material object as a linguistic "thing." Becoming linguistic and being linguistic are two different things.

world that gets "represented" with words. Taylor calls this a "mediational" theory of language or an "Inside/Outside" account of knowledge.[132]

But can we really separate out the testimony of introspection into the good beliefs that talk about reality in small letters, while the bad beliefs aim at talk of Reality with a capital "R?" When we cross the street successfully, we do so by attributing some degree of correspondence to the testimony of introspection. As Taylor points out, "[t]he reality of contact with the real world is the inescapable fact of human (or animal) life, and can only be imagined away by erroneous philosophical argument."[133] Rorty would probably say that among the "entities" we find when we engage in conscious introspection are things such as city streets and speeding cars, but we do not find eternal essences or things in themselves. And this is what he thinks justification as correspondence to the nonhuman requires. What we do find, Rorty maintains, are ways of speaking about our lives together. Looking both ways before crossing the street seems to be working so far.[134] And Rorty frequently contrasts the salutary effects of practices with the lack of usefulness with respect to essence talk. But is it not also useful to believe that some of what I am aware of actually does correspond to a mind-independent reality? What happens, in my view, is that Rorty's linguistic pragmatism becomes a form of linguistic idealism that also creates a dead-end debate in that it severs the connection between mind and world, or between experience and knowledge, in the name of avoiding correspondence.[135]

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[132] Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 162.
[133] Ibid., 175.
[134] This is where Taylor insists the "Inside/Outside" mediational theory uses introspection to draw conclusions about what we can and cannot say about the external world.
[135] See Selivanov, 685. For Sellars, Selivanov observes, the content of perception is not the subject of the extreme deflationary linguistic tact that we find in Rorty, even though the given is imbued with concepts: "As to the material of our senses as independent source, as stated in the independence thesis, Sellars's attitude is more moderate. We do not have to get rid of them or demolish them but only reformulate them in order to free them from the authority of

2.4 Fallibilism, Skepticism, and Justification

The idea that we have immediate access to our concepts is one that is presupposed by classical empiricists as well as by rationalists like Descartes. In this view, our knowledge is believed to be true because it is unmediated and noninferential. When we accept the implications of the Myth of the Given, as Rorty understands it, we see that givenness is not available to us independently of concepts. We may have wanted unmediated knowledge, in order to claim direct representation (i.e., a representation thought to be true), but the attempt to obtain such knowledge is seen to fail since our inherited concepts are already implicated as we reflect on experiential knowledge. This is the essence of mythical givenness, but it may not apply to every instance of givenness in the uncontroversial sense.[136] But, in addition to this empirical side, the place where we have the empirical content of beliefs, we also have the other side of this philosophical dilemma: the rational capacity to be conscious. Here the testimony of introspection reveals our awareness of our own thinking. And again we find ourselves on the

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the Myth of the Given. As Sellars stresses in another place: 'This story will amount to a sense-datum theory only in a sense which robs this phrase of an entire dimension of its traditional epistemological force.'" In the reading I offer of Rorty, the three theses: (a) independence, (b) immediacy, and (c) knowledge are understood by him to signify the prejudices of epistemology-centered philosophy, a view of knowledge he hopes to replace with the idea of a speaker's final vocabulary. In doing so, Rorty argues against the idea of representation and puts for a linguistic view of knowledge as a means to move us away from an analysis of experience and consciousness and towards a non-realist view that urges acceptance of the idea that we can never be right in the sense of obtaining knowledge of how things are. It is this focus on correspondence that Rorty says constitutes the one unifying idea that animates his entire philosophy: correspondence. However, considering the vast array of subjects on which Rorty's work touches, the notion that his only big idea is correspondence strikes some of Rorty's readers as questionable. See, for example, Robert Brandom, *Perspectives on Pragmatism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 107. Brandom says that Rorty used to say of himself that he was a perfect example of Isaiah Berlin's hedgehog: a philosopher who only has one big idea. For Rorty, the big idea is representation. Brandom thinks this is "literally unbelievable" considering the diversity of topics Rorty addressed during his career. But he does concede that the idea of representation is central in Rorty's work. So in a sense, Brandom notes with respect to Rorty as a hedgehog, "there is a core of truth to it."

[136] McDowell thinks that *Bildung* makes these concepts part of second nature which prevents what he calls frictionless spinning—a view he understands to result from Rorty's consensus theory which, given its overemphasis on language, severs all links between mind and world. It also allows to talk about what is given without committing the Natural Fallacy by falling back into talk of mythical givenness.

horns of a dilemma: How can we guarantee that our concepts are true? If sense-data do not pass directly into our understanding, unmediated by concepts, how then do we know that our analysis of concepts is sound?

We have already seen that our belief in unmediated access to material objects is an example of a dogmatic empiricist prejudice. But how do we know that our analysis of a concept is sound? And why make a distinction between sensibility and concepts in the first place? McDowell thinks Rorty privileges a dualism of his own between nature and reason. If we think of the testimony of introspection as belonging on the side of Sellars's logical space of reasons (reasons, beliefs, words, and concepts), then it seems that the analysis of immediacy and of our relationship to entities in the external world could also be applied to what we say about concepts. In other words, the Myth of the Given could be seen as an example of an analysis itself that requires a person to engage in an analysis of conscious introspection. The Myth itself could be a myth insofar as it requires a sharp distinction between nature and reason. If Taylor's critique is sound, drawing on his realist reading of Heidegger's concept of *Inderweltsein*, then a kind of realism can be plausibly defended once we truly move beyond a mediational view of language.[137]

These questions are intended to focus our attention on the sharp distinction Rorty draws between nature and reason (causal relationships and justificatory relationships). The point is not to dismiss the attack on the Given as misguided. Still, what I think we see in Rorty's therapeutic re-thinking of correspondence are distinctions that represent two different types of reflection that he and his opponents utilize: one type (utilized by his opponents) aims at knowledge of either

[137] Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 166.

essences or true statements about how things are (at least this is the aim as Rorty depicts it), and the other (utilized by Rorty) aims to limit itself to talk about social practices and their usefulness. What is not clear to me is how Rorty will avoid utilizing the same forms of reflection he says that metaphysicians use as he reflects on meaning—his use of language and the scheme/content dualism he borrows from Donald Davidson and Thomas Kuhn.

Moreover, proceeding free of metaphysics, as Rorty's linguistic pragmatism hopes to do, while also insisting that our beliefs are not justified by the world (or by universal structures embedded in language), leads Rorty to reject empiricist talk about all forms of world-directedness. But this rejection of "metaphysical" talk also includes Habermasian talk about universal norms. McDowell explains that both of these forms of "metaphysics," and the reasons Rorty has for rejecting them, become issues for Rorty after Sellars's attack on the Given and Davidson's dualism of conceptual scheme and empirical content—a dualism that, as I noted above, Rorty also borrows from Kuhn.[138] When we give up our representational view of truth there really is not, Rorty maintains, anything left in empiricism worth saving. Not only do we see that there are no non-conceptual experiences capable of justifying beliefs, but those who insist, as McCarthy and Habermas do that there are normative features embedded in moral practices, are also guilty of thinking that something from outside the logical space of reasons impinges on what we regard as a justified belief. Habermas's context-transcending norms can be described now, by Rorty, as being on both sides (or wanting to be on both sides) of the nature/reason dualism even though a norm is not a material thing, the sort of object that Locke says above is represented by the word "idea."

[138] McDowell, *Mind and World*, xvi.

This latter requirement is understood, by Habermas and McCarthy, as an unavoidable assumption present in discursive moral practices. But norms conceived of in this way, Rorty thinks, will not really do much to convince a person that her beliefs are wrong. Since human beings are not answerable to anything greater than themselves, Rorty's fallibilsm, the notion that every knowledge claim is open to revision, becomes indistinguishable from skepticism and relativism. But, as Bernstein argues, the latter does not follow from the former. One can be a fallibilist, as was Charles Peirce, without also being a skeptic. The important point for my purposes at present, and we see this in communication theory as practiced by Habermas and McCarthy, is that serious moral claims are made within norms that presuppose both an objective world, as well as an intention, at least on the part of a sincere speaker, to have her moral claims apply, not just to herself and own particular community but to others outside of her particular context.[139] This is supposed to prevent moral claims from being grounded in social consensus alone. For Habermas and McCarthy, it is this last feature, social consensus, that threatens to introduce an extreme form of relativism into moral thought. Such relativism, they think, prevents our moral claims from ever being rational.

In a work entitled *Critical Theory*, McCarthy and fellow philosopher David Hoy address this issue and its implications for moral knowledge. Although Rorty shares Hoy's doubts about the possibility of justifying moral claims with reference to the normativity of universal validity (the idea that a genuine moral claim is one that could be made in front of any imaginable audience), he shares McCarthy's belief in the appropriateness of liberal democratic values.[140] Hoy and McCarthy begin their analysis of the role of reason in Critical Theory agreeing that

[139] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 36.
[140] Hoy does as well, but like Rorty he argues that there can be no universal back-up for such sentiments.

most theorists, who have made the linguistic turn in philosophy, can be thought of as advocates for naturalistic philosophy. When we look at this philosophical perspective, Hoy explains, we see a picture of what philosophy becomes, in the Anglo-American analytic and pragmatist traditions after metaphysics loses its grip. Here, the idea that there is a special sort of knowledge that eludes empirical analysis is opposed by naturalistic philosophy.[141] Human beings are part of nature and, as such, find their homes (and become what we are) in human societies. Rorty's pragmatism also shares, with naturalism, the assumption that human beings have no essences—no "deepest level of the self" as Rorty puts it—and a belief that we are not fundamentally different from other sorts of natural entities.[142]

But Rorty strives to keep his analysis within the logical space of reasons, i.e., the realm that Hegel shows us makes contributions to our knowledge, in the form of concepts, that classical empiricists fails to notice, determined as they were to ground knowledge in the certainty of sense perception as a means to provide unmediated access to the "real" world. In so doing, he utilizes what McDowell calls a nature/reason dualism that strips the world of its justificatory import and relegates perceptual knowledge to the status of mere causes for beliefs rather than justifications for them. This is captured in Rorty's idea of final vocabularies.

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[141] Thomas McCarthy and David Hoy, *Critical Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 149.

[142] *CIS*, xiii. And certainly Rorty does not think, as Kant did, that there is a higher realm that can only be investigated by a "nonempirical super science called philosophy." But as McDowell maintains, Rorty's unbridgeable divide between causes and justifications does look like a dualist theory that separates nature and reason. So to say, as Hoy does, the there is no special realm of knowledge that eludes empirical investigation raises questions about Rorty's unbridgeable divide. If we say that empiricism no longer has anything of value to contribute to our concept of justification, as Rorty does, then how will we utilize empirical analysis or avoid privileging concepts thought to "elude" such analysis if we maintain the nothing crosses over the gap between space of nature and the space of reasons? Reductionist arguments, the one's we saw earlier with Logical Positivists, are not defended by Rorty or Hoy. But I do not see Rorty defending quite the same view of naturalistic philosophy as Hoy does. In fact, one might argue that Marx and Nietzsche, who contribute to the genealogical tradition out of which Foucault operates, have a place for empirical analysis in their thought that Rorty lacks. This might explain the ease with which Hoy argues that an analysis, as long as it is not reductionist in the positivists sense, should retain an empirical dimension. I think this is part of why Rorty criticizes Foucault for doing metaphysics.

So, as I argue above, the minute we began talking about vocabularies, if we understand the issue as Rorty does, we are already taking as true, as if it were a settled fact, that when we make the shift from conceptual to propositional knowledge we are also admitting that all attempts to talk about how things are in the world are attempts to get behind language and talk about the uninterpreted lifeworld. But the theorists I am calling foundationalists do not see it this way. Moreover, and this is what I see in their respective theories, they object to the way that Rorty uses language in his neo-Pragmatism. The logical space of reasons, for Rorty, is the place where we talk about our inherited metaphysical traditions as well as our inherited social practices. The suggestion that we can abjure the first and participate in the second, while at the same time conceiving the second as the ground (the normativity of social consensus), is a suggestion that these "foundationalists" think goes too far. Even experience, much to the vexation of Bernstein, comes to be seen, in Rorty's view, as an attempt to talk of the Given.[143] The job of justification resides squarely on the side of conceptual knowledge, but, in Rorty's linguistic approach, this depends solely on the socialization processes, that is, the words we use in various contexts. The external material world, the space of nature thought by foundationalists to provide, at least, some justification for our beliefs, is stripped of its justificatory role as Rorty focuses, not on conceptual knowledge, but on speaking.

In particular, to maintain as Rorty does, that any attempt to get behind language is actually an attempt to get behind appearances and gain knowledge of how things are, begs the question in favor of the antifoundationalist implications for knowledge claims thought to be contained in the shift from conceptual to propositional knowledge—what McCarthy calls

[143] See James Kloppenberg, "Pragmatism :An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?", *The Journal of American History* vol. 83, no. 1 (Jun, 1996).

"treating ontological conditions as normative principles."[144] The question we should ask, as we see in McDowell's minimal empiricism, is the question "How is it possible for there to be thinking directed at how things are?"[145] Here we might think of this as nonpropositional pre-understandings that are implicated in our present discussion about knowledge. In the absence of such considerations, we seem to be in the position of accepting that there is no connection (no relation other than a non-rational, causal one) between mind and world. I agree with McDowell that such a view of knowledge, one that Rorty codifies in both the cause/justification distinction as well as the private/public distinction, leads to a kind of linguistic idealism of the sort we see in Rorty' s linguistic pragmatism.[146]

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[144] Thomas McCarthy and David Hoy, Critical Theory, 41. I will not pursue this issue at present, but, it seems to me that, there is an important difference between concepts and statements (and, of course, experience which does not figure prominently into Rorty's neo-Pragmatism as it did for earlier pragmatists). The linguistic turn, for which Rorty advocates, attempts to get at what epistemology had previously attempted to elucidate through subject/objet metaphysics. When we look at the present issue, we see, in Rorty's treatment of justification, an attempt to get at the same issue linguistically, rather than through what we might call a substance metaphysics approach. What this does for our present concerns about knowledge, as Rorty explains, is to shift our attention from "things" and onto the idea of a conversation: "To put it another way, once we have picked out the observation sentences conversationally rather than neurologically, further inquiry into "how evidence relates to theory" would seem to be a matter for Polanyi, Kuhn, and Hanson." *PMN*, 227. Rorty's linguistic theory of knowledge is applied to both scientific and moral knowledge. But it seems that there is a difference between talk about the world and talk about our talk about the world. It seems to me that if Rorty is wrong about language, i.e., if socialization does not go all the way down, then his shift from "observation" to "sentences" and "conversations," while it contains the trivial truth that we are using sentences when we speak, overlooks the importance of experience. In other words, we experience "the world" just as we experience the words of other speakers, as well as, the texts I choose to read. The use of sentences for observation seems to approach a theory of knowledge that evinces a kind of linguistic idealism, at best, and solipsism at worse.

[145] McDowell, *Mind and World*, xiii.

[146] See, for example, John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); David Macarthur, "McDowell, Scepticism, and the 'Veil of Perception'," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* (June 2003), 179. Searle suggests that linguistic worldview, in its most extreme form, is the view that reality is socially constructed. There is, as he explains, a long history in which philosophers challenge what he calls the "default" position, such as, Hume's arguments against cause and effect and Descartes' arguments against veridical sense perceptions. Macarthur echoes this point arguing that, in McDowell, even though experience is fallible, even though it may mislead us, we still find a view of experience that involves an experience between us and the world. Guignon and Hiley argue that Rorty's way out of the problems, associated with Enlightenment epistemology, lead to a "disembodied" view of the self, one that, in its attempt to avoid falling into the Myth of Given (this is not how Guignon puts it, but the meaning is the same), cannot talk about physical bodies or the physical, social world in ways that might suggest anything more than brute force impacts; i.e., if we speak of the physical world as justifying beliefs, rather than merely causing them, we are falling into the Myth of the Given, and, hence, doing metaphysics.

I would like to take a brief digression at this point for heuristic purposes. Linguistic idealism is one way we might characterize Rorty's approach to moral and scientific knowledge. It brings to mind Bishop Berkeley's view that existence (or what we can say for certain we are aware of) comes from perception, since what we are aware of are ideas in our minds.[147] To say that nothing is more like an idea than an idea, bears an uncanny resemblance to the linguistic redescription Rorty recommends in which we might say, within the logical space of reasons, nothing is more like a word than a word. I will refer to Rorty's proposal to think of social change as linguistic redescription as Rorty's linguistic pragmatism; however, I think that this idea, especially because of his emphasis on the linguistic part, is of a piece with a kind of nominalism with respect to words. And I am not the first to experience frustration with Rorty's linguistic pragmatism. This idea in Rorty is what Robert Brandom calls a "froth of words,"[148] what Frank Verges calls "hints of *schadenfreude*,"[149] and what others still like Richard Shusterman label "global linguisticism,"[150] what McDowell refers to as a "coherentist"[151] theory,

[147] See Frank Verges, "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," *Philosophy* vol. 67, no 261 (July 1992), 388.
[148] Joshua Gert, *Normative Bedrock* (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 7-8. Gert uses linguistic naturalism in lieu of what he calls the best one-word labels for his method of doing philosophy: "Wittgensteinian" and "Pragmatist." Gert's primary focus is the link between reasons and motivation with an eye towards normative ethics. His "naturalism" includes a commitment to the thesis that words are "tools," and that "the stable parts of our language" (the sorts that "everyday people" use), are adequate for accomplishing our purposes. My concerns lean more towards the idea of grounds, and here we see, in Rorty's thought, a reliance on both Wittgenstein and Pragmatism. So the term suits my purposes, not as a natural or everyday way to approach normative ethics, but as a way of characterizing the attempt to "replace" or "reduce" empirical thinking about "reality" to "naturalism" conceived of linguistically; Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit—Reasoning, Representing and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), 331.
[149] Frank Verges, "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," 390.
[150] Richard Schusterman, "Habermas, Pragmatism, and the Problem of Aesthetics," in *Habermas and Pragmatism*, eds. Mitchell Aboulafia, Myra Bookman and Catherine Kemp (New York: Routledge, 2002), 165-182. See also, Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics* (Lanham, Maryland: Rownan & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 83. Here Schusterman notes, "Like deconstruction, pragmatism recognizes that such identities are the product of perspectival grasping and revisable linguistic practices, and thus are always subject to reinterpretation. This insight may incite a radical anti-essentialism which insists not only on the ubiquity of interpretation but on the absolute contingency and arbitrary particularity of everything. Such a pragmatism, strongly advocated by Richard Rorty, seems, however, to

and what Richard Bernstein does call "linguistic idealism."[152] However, I should also note that Rorty accuses McDowell of treating the world as a kind of "conversational partner;"[153] whereas Michael Williams, building on this point, sees McDowell's solution to linguistic idealism as one that contains a form of idealism itself: In an attempt to avoid the frictionless spinning that threatens to cut us off from the external world, Williams maintains that, McDowell "populates the physical world with quasi-linguistic objects called 'thinkable contents.'" As a result, he internalizes the world and lapses into a form of idealism of his own.[154]

But returning now to Rorty's understanding of the normative import of social practices, as Bernstein points out, the "prevailing prejudice" today is that the linguistic turn displaces the justificatory role that older pragmatists understood to be connected, in the same manner, to experience. But contrary to the hopes of neo-Pragmatists and postmodernists, the linguistic turn creates some of the same aporias and either/or dichotomies—philosophical problems that led many to reject an epistemology that focused too much on knowledge and failed to account for the richness and diversity of the broader category of experience—that result in the "dead-ends" from which critics of the epistemological tradition had hoped to escape.[155] There are, Bernstein notes, a growing number of theorists who are beginning to question the hegemony of this shift away from the world-directedness of thought and towards a linguistic view of knowledge.

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turn into an inverted essentialism of anti-essentialism which asserts 'the universality and necessity of the individual and contingent.'" See also,

[151] John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 14.

[152] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 134.

[153] *TP*, 147.

[154] Michael Williams, "Fatal Attraction: John McDowell's Defence of Empiricism," in Mind and World: Essays on John McDowell's *Mind and World*, ed. János Boros (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1994), 192.

[155] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 136.

What we see among theorists such as Bernstein, McDowell, Searle, and McCarthy is not, of course, a defense of foundationalist epistemology, but rather, a defense of (1) a naturalism that stresses the role of experience, and the importance of some sort of Rational connection between mind and world in ways that Rorty's linguistic approach does not, and an approach to knowledge that (2) aims to elucidate presuppositions believed to be a necessary part of justification. In order to situate the critique of the linguistic turn in the present dissertation, since this "turn" is so broad, and also because many critiques of foundationalist epistemology can rightly be labeled "linguistic," the following from Bernstein is helpful:

> One of the great dangers of the so-called "linguistic turn" is the way it keeps sliding into linguistic idealism, where there is nothing that constrains our language. When [John] McDowell begins his *Mind and World* by describing the "interminable oscillation" between the appeal to the Given and a "frictionless coherentism," he expresses the anxiety that there is nothing that really constrains or ties down our network of beliefs. When [Jürgen] Habermas engages in a self-critique of his epistemic theory of truth, and is worried that even an "ideal justification" may fail to do justice to "realistic intuitions," he is giving expression to the same philosophical anxiety…When [Karl] Popper criticizes the logical positivist appeal to verification and argues that falsification is essential for critical inquiry, he is reiterating Peirce's point…Or again, when [Hans-Georg] Gadamer shows how tragedy enriches our understanding of experience, he calls attention to the painful brute Secondness of experience. "[E]xperience is initially always experience of negation: something is not what we supposed it to be."[156]

The underlying issue, for Bernstein, is that the physical world must be related to our interpretations more intimately than Rorty's causal relations allow. Of course saying this, and also avoiding the Naturalistic Fallacy, is key. Some of these issues may touch on the differences between the two traditions: continental and analytical. But Rorty utilizes arguments contained in both as he prosecutes his thesis. My suspicion is that Rorty would probably say that the anxieties Bernstein references may, in fact, be "dangers." Taking a page from Friedrich Nietzsche,

[156] Ibid., 134-135.

however, we simply must learn to live without the metaphysical security foundationalists sought to locate in knowledge of the how things are. Still, Rorty's solution, although similar to some of the same antimetaphysical strains of thought we find in Nietzsche, does not require a value-positing overman to create new tales through the strength of his will.

2.5 McDowell and Habermas on Justification

Rorty's concerns, as Bernstein noted earlier, are with metaphilosophical issues. But also, as Bernstein notes, pragmatists, generally speaking, have long understood the importance of concrete everyday practices:

> But sometimes we encounter frustrations and resistances that compel us to question what we have taken as unproblematic. When this happens, we can react in many different ways; but one of our options is to engage in a discourse in which we problematize what we initially took for granted, and seek to resolve the problem by moving to a level of discourse in which we evaluate and justify our truth claims. We cannot account for truth by appealing solely to justificatory discourse; nor can we account for truth simply by appealing solely to the "behavioral certainties of everyday life."[157]

The significance of the movement back and forth from action to discourse and back to action—and this is why Bernstein thinks it is important for pragmatists to stress the role of experience—is that it prevents justification from transpiring solely within Rorty's private realm (the logical space of reasons). With a nod to Habermas as well as to McDowell (who like Habermas references the importance of the Gadamerian concept of the lifeworld), Bernstein illustrates the ways in everyday practice show us the connection between discourse and action. Embedded in situations requiring action we see, he explains, relevant assumptions that are already operative. McDowell thinks of these as concepts already contained in Kantian intuitions. And in

[157] Ibid., 184.

Habermas, who Bernstein calls a "communicative Kantian" we see that these are unavoidable presuppositions that are a "necessary" part of communication oriented towards understanding when action is expected to follow. Both argue that the cause/justification divide is bridgeable but for different reasons.

To continue the comparison, Rorty, according to McDowell, fails to see that the impacts received through sense experience (the "world" that Rorty says can cause beliefs but can never justify them), do justify our beliefs—that through spontaneity (understanding), receptivity already contains concepts that "credit experiences with rational relations to judgement and belief."[158] Habermas, on the other hand, seeks to reconstruct the other side of the duality: the logical space of reason. When we consider moral statements, for example, to be right, Habermas takes that to mean "that in a rational discourse under approximately ideal conditions they could be agreed to by anyone concerned."[159] The operative concept here is the norm within which we make our statements. There are reasons to think, Habermas tells us, that the norm is a rational structure that exists (or is capable of having validity) outside the particular context in which speakers find themselves, but it is implicated in the process of coming to an agreement. It is this capacity for "context transcendence" that shows how moral validity claims carry with them an appeal to something universal. Specific moral claims are never right with respect to how things are in the world, but within the logical space of reason, the realm where human beings come to an understanding through language, there are rational concepts in operation that make validity claims rational.

[158] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 162.
[159] Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 229.

For both McDowell and Habermas, if we can see our way clear to saying that statements (or social practices) alone are not enough to prevent frictionless spinning, we can see how the idea that there must be something that crosses over the cause/justification divide functions as a central theme in their work. Moreover, the felt need that truth claims require a more robust norm than the one that regards normativity as whatever is accepted, at present, by a community, places their work in opposition to Rorty's but for different reasons. And in both, it is important to connect validity to structures outside the contingency of local practices (language-games). This, they think, will serve as a check on coherentism and the accompanying relativism that many think results from Rorty's neo-Pragmatism. While both McDowell and Habemas can be seen to reconstruct Kantian themes, there is, however, a disagreement about the role of theoretical and practical reason. Habermas accepts the sharp distinction between causes and justifications. He also accepts a distinction between action and discourse. This can be seen, analogously, as an extension of the nature/reason dichotomy: the logical space of nature being the place where we find things such as action, causes, and the material impacts received through receptivity. The logical space of reasons contains concepts, justification, and discourse. But, as I understand the differing positions concerning discourse and action contained in the present debate about justification, both McDowell and Bernstein view such strict separations as acceptance of a duality that pragmatists traditionally abjure. As Bernstein explains:

> Unlike Rorty, I do not want to deny that in some circumstances it is helpful to draw as distinction between action and discourse, but we should realize how misleading this distinction can be: how much "discourse" is embedded in action-contexts and how much action is embedded in discourse. Habermas's pragmatic theory of truth depends on drawing a clear distinction between action and discourse. But if we begin to question the rigidity of this distinction, we question the very idea of a Janus-faced concept of truth. When acting, I do take all sorts of things for granted without questioning them, but action is not dumb. It is—as

> Dewey says—funded with meaning and what I learned from the past. And as I act in the world, I am frequently adjusting my actions as I encounter unanticipated obstacles—as practical certainties turn into uncertainties.[160]

Habermas's reconstruction of reason in Kant allows him to see communication as rational. He also wants to view reason as a faculty in humans that it is not susceptible to the vicissitudes of local practices or to the deforming effects of power relations as analyzed by philosophers such as Foucault and Nietzsche. McDowell wants some degree of correspondence, a justificatory dimension that is absent in Habermas's treatment; however, for Habermas, if we can keep action and discourse (nature and reason) separate, then, in a sense, the "purity" of reason (and not correctness with respect to the world), can serve as the ground for a theory of knowledge.

But ironically, this move places him closer to Rorty on this issue than to either McDowell or Bernstein. Here we see Habermas making the linguistic turn and arguing for a ridged duality just as we see in Rorty. The difference, however, is in Habermas's understanding of validity. Unlike Rorty, Habermas thinks that reason does give us access to something outside the contingency of the local language-games we play in our societies. These rational presuppositions are present as we speak and evaluate truth claims. But for Rorty, there are no a priori limits placed on communication. Also, and this is a difference between Habermas and McDowell, although our "realist intuitions" are important for both theorists, and these intuitions are seen to point to the unavoidable presupposition that there is an objective world that is the same for everyone, Habermas stays within the perspective of a linguistic, "formal-pragmatic perspective."[161] Rather than arguing for a reconstructed empiricism that seeks to make the connection between mind and world rational, as McDowell does, or attempting to side-step the

[160] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 187.
[161] Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 2.

issue by arguing for acceptance of social practices alone, as Rorty does, Habermas accepts the Kantian idea of a two-tiered conception of reason. What we gain from this is a conception of reason that contains unavoidable presuppositions of universality. And even though Habermas bemoans the severing of mind and world as does McDowell, and even though he thinks we need to defend a conception of justification that makes sense of our realist intuitions, he accepts, in my view, the same nature/reason divide that Rorty references in his version of linguistic pragmatism.

To be sure, as Bernstein points out, naturalists (here understood generally as theorists who have made the linguistic turn) eschew talk of correct representation and things in themselves, but they do not eschew empirical thinking (or at least not all naturalist theorists do) to the extent that Rorty does. But this later charge will require some explication since Rorty himself is not clear on when he is making an empirical argument and when he is making a linguistic one. Even though Rorty says that he sees "nothing worth saving in empiricism," he does seem to make use of at least some forms of empirical thought (reports on appearances?) as he prosecutes his antirepresentationalist thesis.[162] I have already expressed my admiration of Rorty as a brilliant thinker and a public liberal with whom I am in agreement on most issues. But here, in the name of therapeutic philosophy, he seems to conflate empirical, linguistic, and therapeutic approaches to problems growing out of foundationalist epistemology. The result is that, when arguing against Rorty's linguistic approach, one feels as if one is being attacked from somewhere but where exactly is not always clear. One feels as if his or her sacred ground is being threatened by an attacker who, himself, has no sacred ground to defend. Strategically, we might wish to seize the higher ground and halt the attack, but how does one halt "therapy?"

[162] *TP*, 150.

2.6 Justification and the Material Given

As an example of Rorty's ambivalent attitude towards experience, keeping in mind that, as a neo-pragmatist Rorty works out of a tradition in which the concept of experience is central, I cite a criticism that Thomas McCarthy advances. McCarthy focuses on Rorty's reliance, albeit an unstated one, on universal concepts that McCarthy maintains we all utilize as we advance moral arguments and attempt to persuade, rationally, our interlocutors. What we find, McCarthy explains as he draws our attention to the relevance of empirical knowledge in Rorty's thought, as well as to the conspicuous absence of any serious treatment of counterfactuals that undercut his linguistic pragmatism, is that:

> With scarcely a glance at the human sciences, Rorty assures us that the only species universal is "the ability to feel pain," to which he sometimes adds the "susceptibility to…humiliation" as a distinctively human form of pain (*CIS*, pp. 177, 92). Why not also add the ability to speak, act, think, work, learn, interact, play roles, be guided by norms, have desires, and, indeed, feel feelings other than humiliation? Rorty's answer seems to be: because there is no *common* language, system of actions, and so forth. That is true, but the empirical evidence suggests that there are common features in all of these areas, and that these features are at least as extensive as the shared aspects of humiliation. Rorty seems not to be interested in any of the research concerned with social, cultural, linguistic, or psychological universals. At times he suggests that any attempt to "get at something universal" is ipso facto an attempt to grasp "real essences" (*CIS*, pp. 76, 75). But unless metaphysics is the only science, that is evidently not the case. At other times he implies that whichever universals we may find, they will not be sufficient to determine the shape of individual existence (*CIS*, p. 26). This is certainly true, but insufficience is not irrelevance. Commonalities would be relevant if they began to spin a web of shared humanity across Rorty's unbridgeable divide between the ineffable singularity of personal identity and the discursive publicity of social life. This becomes apparent in his discussions of morality and politics.[163]

[163] Thomas McCarthy, "Ironist Theory as a Vocation: A Response to Rorty's Reply," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 16, no. 3 (Spring 1990), 649.

McCarthy objects to what I am calling Rorty's linguistic pragmatism. This pragmatism without experience threatens to rob our interpretations of any of their world-directed pretentions (the empirical content of belief rendered mysterious with the removal of all constraints save those conversational ones).[164] What I find is that Rorty's linguistic pragmatism is consistent with—or "piggy-backs" on—the arguments of naturalists as it takes aim at subject/object metaphysics (something earlier pragmatists did without arguing that mythical givenness also includes conscious reflection on our experience), but his arguments become "linguistic" when attempting to do "philosophy without mirrors." In other words, Rorty is a naturalist when criticizing foundational epistemology, but when describing his own project (and insulating himself from the charge that he too has a metaphysical theory that privileges something thought to be "real"), he utilizes a linguistic approach to knowledge that depicts "all awareness as a linguistic affair."[165]

We might think of a non-philosopher's view when faced with the reality of material deprivation, an inequality that affects a large percentage of the world's population. The "wrongness" of a situation, if indeed she concludes that starving to death, for example, is something we should prevent, and hence something to be regarded as morally wrong, seems, for her, to be connected to something she can see. As she tries to persuade others of the wrongness of this situation, she points to something that we all see in the objective world that we all share in common. Rorty has argued that the cause/justification distinction—here understood, in my view, as a linguistic re-thinking of Hume's distinction between the descriptive "is" and the moral "ought"—, prevents me from connecting wrongness to what I see. I can believe that I see people

[164] See Kloppenberg.
[165] Ibid., 142. This is John McDowell's assessment of Rorty's linguistic historicism. McDowell thinks that there is still a role for empiricism (minimally construed) to play in philosophy.

suffering, but I cannot say that my statements about material deprivation are justified by what I see.

As a follower of Habermas, McCarthy does not attempt to breach Rorty's nature/reason barrier, but he does point to a potential problem for Rorty with respect to cruelty. A linguistic conception of norms seems to face a difficulty when it comes to explaining the connection between the material (physical world) and the norm (since the norm is on the other side of the nature/reason gap and, as such, it runs the risk of presenting itself as either a thought object or a quasi-linguistic object). As I understand Rorty, neither of these characterizations would be acceptable due to the Cartesian tones struck by these notes. A thought object that arises once it is caused to do so through receptivity of the world's impressions, seems like an analysis that takes us back in the direction of epistemology in the Cartesian and British-empiricist style. And the shift from perceptual/conceptual knowledge to propositional does give us a way to talk about sentences. This leads us away from the philosophy of the subject and towards the shared, linguistically constituted lifeworld we all inhabit. But still, the cause/justification distinction leads to the conclusion that something happens on the reason side (or linguistic side) of the duality. Whether we say it is intimately related through a justificatory relationship or merely causally related, we still have a quasi-metaphysical relationship between subject and object. McCarthy thinks that Rorty is privileging talk of cruelty by connecting receptivity to a normative term such as "worst." He is not arguing for correspondence, but the ways in which Rorty seems to fall back into the Given, suggests that we should at least look at the other shared forms of communication extant in the culture. Doing so would not make us right in McDowell's world-directed sense, but it would prevent the content of empirical beliefs from being reduced to the

status of mere causal impacts. In other words, we can say that cruelty is the worst we do, but if we jettison all attempts to justify with respect to the world as well as with respect to universal communicative norms, then we are left with a statement about cruelty that is justified by nothing that has the potential to transcend what is relative to a particular community. So here we see both world-directedness and the normativity of universality becoming, in Rorty's treatment of the issue, desires, on the part of metaphysicians, for a justificatory relation between the human to the nonhuman.

But Rorty does not think the situation his analysis of justification leaves us in is as bad as his critics do; we do not need a theory to criticize. All we really need to do is start talking about what strikes us as good. But read in the manner that McCarthy suggests, Rorty is appealing either to something objectively valid in the external, material world—something presumable available to all of us through experience—, or he is attempting to persuade us using terms that we too find persuasive. Either way he is utilizing normative structures that he says we cannot have and do not need. In the first case he assumes that experience impinges on beliefs in ways that the attack on the Myth of the Given does not permit. In the second case he is guilty of a performative contradiction in that he is using language to persuade us of the truth of his argument, a discursive practice that assumes the validity of communitive norms, but his argument, if correct, is that there are no universal or transcendent justificatory norms outside of our local, contingent practices. However, if we talk about experience, I think Rorty would probably argue that we are treating experience as a kind of middle-man between our "minds" and the external world, and that such a view of justification threatens to bring us back to the representational picture of knowledge he wants to put permanently behind. Yet, we are, all of us

at present, engaging in discourse about justification so perhaps McCarthy's point about our current justificatory practices is sound—perhaps we are operating with at least some structures, as we attempt to persuade our interlocutors, rationally, that we all believe to have context-transcending validity.

2.7 Rorty's Humanism: A Post-positivist Conception of Normativity

Is justification rooted in experience as well as in the discursive, linguistic practices Rorty calls our final vocabularies? For Logical Positivists, empirical thinking is crucial and it paves the way for a reductionist theory of knowledge that dismisses, as pseudo-science, all knowledge claims concerning entities thought to be special and "irreducible"—the special domain of philosophy. And, as we have seen, for pragmatists such as Bernstein and McDowell, Rorty's linguistic pragmatism pays too high a price in avoiding the problems stemming from our attempt to answer the epistemological skeptic. For McDowell it sacrifices world-directedness and for Bernstein it strips from experience all justificatory important, thus making conversational constraints the only check on our interpretations of objective "reality."

Rorty acknowledges that the idea of correspondence is an abiding theme around which much of his work revolves. We can understand his criticism of foundationalist epistemology, his ironism and their consequences for moral and social thought, as well as his views on contingency and language, in light of his interest in correspondence. Studying under Rudolf Carnap at the University of Chicago, Rorty cut his teeth on the antimetaphysical arguments of the Vienna Circle during his formative years. However, the radical empiricism of the positivist movement, going back to David Hume, is extirpated from Rorty's thought. Mirroring the criticism of

Scientism in the German tradition, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Rorty blames the *Quest for Certainty* for creating an idea of truth that led to the relativism and nihilism experienced in the twentieth century.[166]

As a professional philosopher and writer, Rorty gained notoriety during the 1960s and 1970s publishing works within the analytical tradition. But, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, he utilized arguments from continental thinkers in a seminal work that made many of the same points he had made previously in his analytical writings, especially concerning philosophy of mind. Bernstein, a lifelong friend of Rorty's and a former college classmate, reminds us that Rorty's initial interests in philosophy were in metaphysics and that, under the tutelage of Richard McKeon and Paul Weiss at Chicago and Yale respectively, he "developed a comprehensive and sophisticated knowledge of the history of philosophy."[167] It is these metaphilosophical interests that led him to conclude that there were problems with the linguistic approach as practiced by theorists in the Anglo-American analytical tradition just as there were within epistemology-centered philosophy. As Bernstein explains:

> At the time, many proponents of conceptual analysis strongly believed that the genuine task of philosophy is to expose conceptual and linguistic confusions. They argued that to say that sensations can be identified with brain states is a conceptual confusion, an egregious category mistake (a howler!). But Rorty challenged the thesis that one can "draw a firm line between the 'conceptual' and

[166] Readers will note the reference to John Dewey's work. See John Dewey, *Vol. 4: 1929, The Quest for Certainty* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1988). Rorty's neo-Pragmatism leads him to a similar position with respect to the desire on the part of philosophers for absolute certainty; however, Rorty also focuses on mental states and the testimony of conscious introspection in his attempt to expunge correspondence from his thought. This might put him at odds with the pragmatist focus on experience. Rorty also notes many similarities between Dewey and Heidegger which are relevant to Rorty's criticism of foundationalist epistemology. The changes taking place on both sides of the Atlantic provide an impetus for the Linguistic Turn which I will discuss below. For further discussion of the emergence of crisis consciousness, the importance of the *Fragestellung*, and the criticism of Scientism see Charles Bambach, *Heidegger, Dilthey, and the Crisis of Historicism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), 21-55; John Zammito, *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2004); Frank G. Verges, "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," *Philosophy*, no 261 (July 1992), 387.

[167] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 201.

> the 'empirical', and thus…differentiate between a statement embodying a conceptual confusion and one that expresses a surprising empirical result." The article was important for a number of reasons. Rorty showed a new way of thinking about the identity theory (sometimes labeled "eliminative materialism"); he also called into question one of the cherished dogmas of linguistic conceptual analysis—that we can sharply distinguish conceptual analysis from empirical inquiry. He challenged this "new" linguistic version of a priori transcendental argumentation. He concluded his article by warning linguistic philosophers that they should not "think that they can do better what metaphysicians did badly—namely, prove the irreducibility of entities."[168]

The connection here between philosophy of science, philosophy of mind, and language are worth noting. Three years before Rorty's article was published, Thomas Kuhn published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In a chapter entitled "Anomaly and the Emergence of Scientific Discoveries," Kuhn explained how the discovery of X-rays by physicist Wilhelm Röntgen had actually occurred by accident. Kuhn writes that Röntgen "interrupted a normal investigation of cathode rays because he had noticed that a barium platinocyanide screen at some distance from his shielded apparatus glowed when the discharge was in process."[169] The thing "discovered" was never the intended subject of his inquiry. Reason and conscious motives did not result in progress, change came about through happenstance. The idea of accidental discoveries, and new vocabularies for describing these, figures prominently in what Rorty calls his "epistemological behaviorism." The point I wish to make is this: Rorty argues against the idea that there exists in human beings a core or a deepest level of the self. In limiting his analysis to how we speak about things, Rorty makes it possible to avoid talk about our awareness of our conscious feelings. But, as Bernstein and McDowell argue, this also means that we are not constrained by anything in our "natures" or in the external world until these things (or rather if these things)

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[168] Ibid., 203.
[169] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1996), 57.
[169] *TP*, 152.

become part of the conversational constraints within the space of reasons rather than nature or the deepest level of the self.

If we look at the larger issue, we see that the rise of language philosophy coincides with the demise of empiricism. And interestingly, although this stems from nothing more than the coincidental timing of one's birth, Rorty's intellectual development follows the same path we see in the culture at large: the influence of positivism and the plausibility of empiricist metaphysics wane, while linguistic analysis moves to replace (or displace) them. I have in mind the treatment of this issue by John Zammito in his book *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes*. Like McDowell, Zammito does not think that the rise of post-positivist philosophy justifies denigrating empirical knowledge and its importance for scientific practice. In his treatment of the history of analytical philosophy and the attack on empiricism, Zammito understands the intellectual changes associated with the "linguistic turn" as the developments responsible for the "historicization of reason" and the social construction of knowledge." Unlike Rorty, who Zammito refers to as a prophet who proclaims the "end of epistemology," Zammito argues that the belief that the "turn" justifies a social constructivist thesis with respect to ethical and scientific knowledge—in spite of the traction this idea gains during the decades after the Second World War—is mistaken; such conclusions are exaggerated at best and more likely, he suggests, these are unwarranted conclusions drawn by theorists who have been too enamored with the relationship between linguistic representation, meaning, and the belief that empiricism and external realism are dispensable. Zammito analyzes the theoretical roots of this idea and looks at its effect on what he calls the "sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK)."[170] Although he treats some theorists

[170] John Zammito, *A Nice Derangement of Epistemes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 3.

who deal with knowledge in the field of sociology, he argues that the theoretical work of Thomas Kuhn and Quine's "rebellion" in the 1950's (theorists whose work greatly influenced Rorty), lay the foundation for the skepticism that emerges in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Seen in light of these developments, Rorty's criticism of positivism has historical precedents. Moreover, his subsequent shift to literary themes in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, can be seen, not as a case of the treason of the clerks, but rather, in my view, a continuation of the metaphilosophical concerns he had had all along. These interests, as Bernstein explains, were connected to a "deep humanism" in Rorty's work that consistently surfaces in his writing on solidarity (the belief that we should do as much as we can to strengthen our moral obligations to our fellows).[171] This may be surprising given that Rorty also argues against anything "deep" that might serve as a ground for these obligations. But in his view, and this is part of his humanist commitment to social solidarity, we are answerable only to our fellow human beings and nothing else. On my reading of the two influential works by Rorty mentioned above, there is no disjoint; his abstract metaphilosophical writings are actually connected, logically and consistently, to his practical moral and social concerns. What makes this continuity clear I think is understanding how Rorty employs his linguistic pragmatism. Ultimately, Rorty's disenchantment with analytical philosophy leads him to recommend journalists and novelists over philosophers as candidates best suited to promote social solidarity.[172] But I think Rorty's debt to philosophy is greater than he sometimes allows or, as Bernstein and McCarty argue, his either/or dichotomies leave us with the impression that philosophy either provides a reified realm

[171] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 201.
[172] *CIS*, 141.

of facts that exist independently of minds and human languages or we have no standards at all save the ones we happen to choose.

In Rorty's linguistic picture of philosophy, neither world-directedness nor universally valid norms available, a priori, to inquires has a place. In fact, both conceptions of justification are seen, by Rorty, as a continuation of the imperative to answer the epistemological skeptic. Seen in this way, the desire to be right with respect to something outside our local language-games is another version of the desire to be right with respect to something more than ourselves. Rorty's humanism holds that we do not need these sorts of norms:

> To put this claim in another way, which may help bring out its connections with naturalism, I am saying that the positivists were absolutely right in thinking it imperative to extirpate metaphysics, when "metaphysics" means the attempt to give knowledge of what science cannot know. For this is the attempt to find a discourse which combines the advantages of normality with those of abnormality—the intersubjective security of objective truth combined with the edifying character of an unjustifiable but unconditional moral claim. The urge to set philosophy on the secure path of a science is the urge to combine Plato's project of moral choice as ticking off the objective truths about a special sort of object (the Idea of the Good) with the sort of intersubjective and democratic agreement about objects found in normal science. Philosophy which was utterly unedifying, utterly irrelevant to such moral choices as whether or not to believe in God would count not as *philosophy*, but only as some special sort of science. So as soon as a program to put philosophy on the secure path of science succeeds, it simply converts philosophy into a boring academic specialty. Systematic philosophy exists by perpetually straddling the gap between description and justification, cognition and choice, getting the facts right and telling us how to live.[173]

Even a fellow naturalist such as Willard Van Orman Quine who, like Rorty, made the linguistic turn in philosophy and ceased thinking of knowledge as "correct" correspondence, is still a

[173] *PMN*, 384-85.

"metaphysician" according to Rorty in that Quine maintains that there is a place in our thinking for empirical analysis to distinguish between physics and everything else.[174]

As Quine observes, "Let me interject that for my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience."[175] I read Quine to say that physical objects and gods do not differ in kind because of, in terms of the "epistemological footing," the cause/justification distinction. We come to see, as we interpret the entities that come to sight for us, that the meaning of an object or idea depends on the concepts (rational statements) with which we are already operating. Had we grown-up in a society that taught us that natural phenomena were caused by the will of the gods, we would probably believe the opposite of Quine's statement above: We would rely on divine explanations rather than physicalist ones. But we are talking here about knowledge, that is, the warranted belief that X and Y are connected, not apparently connected we must stress, but rather that there is a necessary connection between the two that we can know with absolute certainty. The sorts of argument that lead to skeptical conclusions concerning cause and effect seem to me to be different from the arguments that lead to skeptical conclusions concerning the ideas of realism and the belief that our statements are answerable, not just to other statements we accept as true, but to the mind-independent, external world that provides "friction" capable of shaping our

[174] See, *TP*, 143.
[175] W.V.O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *The Philosophical Review* vol. 60, no. 1 (Jan. 1951), 41.

interpretation as we experience the world and not just, as Rorty maintains, describe and redescribe it.

Now, in terms of the pre-understandings which come from our culture and the role these play in our interpretations, the discussion we see above in Rorty and Quine seems correct to me in the sense that our culture determines our horizons, and these horizons determine what can become meaningful for us. This is an important issue that touches on the relationship between the individual and society, but from another point of view it becomes a mere trivial truth; uninterpreted entities, and entities lying beyond my horizons, cannot become "issues" for me until they are experienced, in some way, and/or until I try to speak about them. But since the issue concerns whether or not anything bridges the cause/justification divide, we cannot make the shift from talk of concepts to talk of language (and cease talking about the content of sense experience) without the risk that our argument becomes circular.

This is what I mean by trivially true: We are using words when we use words to describe words. But are we doing more? Since I do not believe that the gods are living on top of a mountain that, if I lived in Athens, Greece, I could reach after driving in a car for several hours, and since, today, we have access to helicopters and satellite photographs, etc., it is not rational for people living within the horizons of modernity to believe in Homer's gods rather than physical objects. But Quine's statement seems to say more than this. He seems to say that what we believe to exist depends on our horizons and that, potentially at least, gods and physical objects admit of a kind of epistemological equivalency. Here we are speaking, not just about the cause/justification distinction but rather about the realist/antirealist debate concerning whether any sort of claim can bridge the gap between the brute force impacts that come from the

empirical world and the reasons I have, the justifications I have, for believing something to be true.

Of course, Quine says that he does believe in physical objects rather than gods, even though he accepts that there is nothing in the nature of things that makes this belief true. However, even this modest reservation, on Quine's part, does not go unnoticed by Rorty who remarks, "Quine would like to think that the language of physics has some sort of priority and that everything else which does not fit into that language must be regarded as a concession to practical convenience rather than as part of an account of how things really are."[176] For Rorty, both Quine and McDowell accept a "dichotomy between the realm of nature and that of law."[177] But in the view I am attempting to elucidate in this dissertation, practical convenience also involves the idea of empirical experience. Whether an earthquake occurs because (1) Poseidon, or (2) the Earth's shifting tectonic plates "caused" it to move, the experience tells us that "something" moved. Our interpretation of that "something" depends on our conceptual knowledge (on concepts rather than the material objects to which classical empiricists thought we had unmediated access), but "knowing" that we had an experience does not depend on inherited religious or scientific knowledge—conceptual knowledge that constitutes our interpretive framework.

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[176] *TP*, 143.

[177] Ibid., 143. This is the cause/justification distinction. Nature is the empirical world that gives rise to Hume's impressions, to Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts, and to what Hegel analyses under the heading: Sense Certainty. I would also like to note that Hume's demotion of cause and effect to the status of a mere belief that he analyzes using the terms contiguity, succession, and the idea of a necessary connection, anticipates the current debate concerning the cause/justification distinction. See David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1969), 58; David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and the Principles of Morals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 62-67.

It seems to me that Rorty is too quick to take issues, such as the present one concerning horizons, to justify larger and more radical views that touch on both the cause/justification distinction as well as the debate concerning realism. McDowell's idea of the world-directedness of thought seems important to me in the present case. Whatever we say about the cause/justification problem, we seem obligated, as rational inquirers, to acknowledge that our statements are intended to be about a real world that exists independently of our minds. If McDowell is correct, then the conclusions Rorty draws about empiricism are too extreme: We can admit that conceptual knowledge is involved in our experience of the material world without severing all connections between mind and world, without going so far as to say that "all awareness is a linguistic affair."[178]

The fear I have, and this is one of the reasons for my reservations concerning Rorty's critique of correspondence, is that in my view social criticism does need a non-linguistic anchor and this is one of the big issues on which naturalists disagree.[179] Such an anchor would permit a rational distinction between good and bad arguments (rather than merely appealing to what other people in our community allow us to say, which is all that Rorty says we can do). And, of course, non-linguistic does not mean unmediated. Moods and feelings are non-linguistic as are hunger and pain (even Rorty would admit that this last item is). If my response to any of the

[178] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 143. Rorty argues this point similarly when he says, "This view has as a corollary that knowledge of particulars or of concepts is not temporally prior to knowledge of propositions (but always an abstraction from the latter), and thus that empiricist accounts of language-learning and of the nonpropositional basis for propositional knowledge are inevitably misguided. The crucial premise of this argument is that there is no such thing as a justified belief which is nonpropositional, and no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions. So to speak of our acquaintance with redness or with an instantiation of redness as "grounding" (as opposed to being a causal condition of) our knowledge that "this is a red object" or that "redness is a color" is always a mistake" (*PMN*, 183).

[179] In Chapter 5 I discuss the debate between David Hoy and Thomas McCarthy (these two are followers of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas). Although Hoy is an antifoundationalist who argues against the Habermasian idea of a universal audience, he still identifies himself as a naturalist who, I will argue, leaves room for empirical thinking in ways that Rorty's pragmatism does not.

experiences (or if the stance I take-up to these) is shaped by more than the linguistic tradition into which I have been socialized, then something outside the local, contingent language-game (the *sui generis* space of reasons that justify my beliefs) is bearing on what I believe to be true. In the end, Rorty confesses he cannot make sense of the concept of ideology unless by ideology one simply means a "bad idea."[180] If Rorty is right about language then he is right about ideology—there is, in my view, no getting behind the world to see how things really are in the picture of the hermeneutic situation that Rorty's linguistic pragmatism paints. But if his antirepresentational understanding of language is not correct, then my belief that cruelty, humiliation, and social deprivation are bad in the sense that they are contrary to the way things are (and not just to the descriptions I choose in characterizing them) could be sound, but only if something can bridge the divide between causes and justifications.

My thinking about this issue has been influenced by the work of Richard Bernstein, Thomas McCarthy, Frank Verges, John Searle as well as my reading of Karl Marx's *Capital* and Robert Bellah's communitarian thought in *The Good Society* (although I will not be discussing the latter works in detail in this dissertation). If my critique of Rorty's use of linguistic redescription is sound, then this dissertation will be a small step in the direction of a post-metaphysical anchor for humanist principles. But Rorty would argue that such an anchor is not possible, and that my belief that it is both possible and necessary can be "handled" by making the linguistic turn—accepting that socialization "goes all the way down," and that there is no getting behind language.[181] By appealing to the ongoing conversation in one's linguistic community, Rorty replaces the appeal to experience with an appeal to language. While I do not think that all

[180] *CIS*, 84.
[181] Ibid., xiii.

appeals to experience are appeals to a mythical given, I do not wish to defend a conception of justification that maintains that all experience is always "mediated" by language. Once we agree that it is mediated, a relevant question still remains: Is there anything that crosses over the divide between causes and justifications? Mediation does not entail that there is or that there is not something that justifies our beliefs and that, at the same time, does not reside squarely within the logical space of reasons.[182]

So realist intuitions notwithstanding, Rorty understands these appeals, in their various forms, as appeals to universals and to things in themselves—a desire for something more than human, a desire that characterizes the nature of metaphysical thinking. The course of action he recommends aims to replace (or handle) these intuitions by encouraging us to make the linguistic turn—accepting that socialization "goes all the way down," and that there is no getting behind language so that we can locate real things or universal truths.[183] I argue, in this dissertation, that Rorty's determination to keep his critique of metaphysics within the realm of language pays too high a price. In the name of moving beyond the tradition of metaphysics, Rorty's linguistic pragmatism severs the connection between mind and world and prevents us from appealing to

[182] Bernstein is critical of Rorty's use of the linguistic turn, but when he talks about experience he argues that our experience is mediated by language. This, it seems to me, is something that Rorty could say as well. If we refrain from defending the idea that we can appeal directly to experience or to things in themselves, but insist that experience is mediated by language, then it seems that we are still arguing about whether awareness is completely a linguistic affair or only partially. And for Bernstein, in keeping with the traditional pragmatists with whom he identifies, this means that we have no access to things in themselves and that knowledge is not about discovering finalities or fixed ends. However, unlike Rorty, Bernstein does not think we should extirpate all references to experience in the name of avoiding a metaphysics of experience. He thinks our task, as it was for Dewey, is to reconstruct philosophy with an eye towards what is useful for human beings. This task does not require fixed end, in fact, it focuses our attention on the dangers of fixed ends. Ultimately, Bernstein's position is remarkably close to Rorty's. In the end, Bernstein says that the difference between Rorty and himself is that he never "suffered from the 'God that failed' syndrome" that took such a toll on Rorty. So, Bernstein sees a metaphysician such as Plato as a "great defender of the ongoing, unending dialogue" in philosophy about how we live and treat others. See, Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 214. In spite of the many insightful critiques Bernstein offers of Rorty's use and abuse of the linguistic turn, he (Bernstein) does not really think that Rorty's analysis of knowledge and the cause/justification distinction is incorrect.

[183] *CIS*, xiii.

experience in a way that, in my view, does permit a distinction between good and bad arguments with respect, not just to what others allow us to say, but also with respect to how things really are.[184]

[184] Thomas McCarthy thinks that there is a rather large logical fallacy running through the heart of postmodern linguistic analysis itself. This fallacy involves "treating ontological conditions as normative principles." Thomas McCarthy and David Hoy, *Critical Theory*, 41.

CHAPTER 3

PROPOSITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND FRICTION

Central to Rorty's project is the idea that truth is made. If the basic assumption of most people is that human beings discover truths rather than make them, then a challenge to this common premise represents a sea change in Western thought. Although there are elements of this idea, harbingers of things to come, sprinkled throughout the Western tradition, Rorty sees the intellectual changes occurring during the French Revolution as a contemporary source for our current views. "About two hundred years ago," he observes, "the idea that truth was made rather than found began to take hold of the imagination of Europe."[185] The realization that our most sacred institutions could be replaced, almost over-night, peaks the interest of intellectuals and paves the way for new conceptions of knowledge. As Rorty frequently reminds us, changes such as these show that the "whole vocabulary of social relations" can be altered rapidly. The Aristotelian conception of knowledge as an accurate statement about reality comes to be seen as questionable. Not only might we question the commonly accepted view concerning "reality" in traditional foundationalist epistemological theory, we begin to understand our activities, as language producing beings, to contribute to what we had been calling reality.

At roughly the same time, Rorty argues that the Romantic poets were collapsing the distinctions between religion, philosophy, and science. The position of philosophy as the queen of the sciences could no longer hold sway in the imagination of intellectuals as these old Enlightenment views about reason, knowledge, and society were being pulled apart by changes occurring in Europe. Today, for many contemporary intellectuals, "questions about how to give

[185] *CIS,* 3.

a sense to one's own life or that of one's community…are questions for art or politics…rather than philosophy, or science."[186] The way out of the tradition of metaphysics requires one to move beyond the prejudices of philosophers in favor of theory—that special domain where philosophers apply their trade. Rorty argues that this means that literary conceptions of knowledge could be just as "true" as scientific or philosophical views. If truth is not an accurate statement about reality, then there is no need for a special discipline called philosophy whose job it is to inspect statements to see which ones count as true. This either/or dichotomy, a tactic Rorty utilizes frequently, allows us to see the French Revolution as a change in the "vocabulary of social relations." But such a depiction, argues Jean Berthke Elshtain, allows Rorty to treat the French Revolution as a "quasi-foundational" exemplar of the politics of redescription. In spite of Rorty's, "don't be cruel" rule, his "bland" description of this important event "wipes the blood off the pages."[187] But as Rorty maintains consistently, the world may cause us to feel one way or the other, but it does not justify the statements we make. In this case, we have no knowledge of the *wrongness* of the "17,000 who were guillotined between 1792 and 1794."[188] But, depending on how we have been "programmed" with a "language,"[189] as Rorty puts it, we may feel that X is wrong. Rorty's sharp distinction between nature and reason, as well as Davidson's collapsing of the scheme/content distinction, a view of the hermeneutic situation that Rorty accepts, allows

[186] Ibid., 3. Rorty also has in mind, and this is an insight he borrows from Thomas Kuhn (paradigm) and Donald Davidson (conceptual scheme), the importance of the paradigm for human knowledge. The things that are seen as significant for us in society become so due to the influence of our horizon or cultural paradigm. In keeping with classical pragmatism, things in themselves are not automatically important in and of themselves, but rather they become so due to the influence of the cares and concerns we inherit. In other words, the paradigm shapes our concerns which in turn shape the ways in which we speak about the entities that we deal with on an ordinary, everyday basis.
[187] Jean Berthke Elshtain, "Don't be Cruel: Reflections on Rortyian Liberalism," in *Richard Rorty*, eds. Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), 145.
[188] Ibid., 145.
[189] *CIS*, 6.

him to argue as he does: If knowledge is not about correspondence to reality, then asking questions about absolute truths, as opposed to relative ones, is a form of discourse that we no longer need.[190]

Rorty's contrast sets up a concept that motivates his antirepresentationalist (linguistic redescriptive) view of knowledge. The roots of his division between the private ironist and the public liberal can be found in his treatment of the collapse of the tradition of metaphysics. Rorty sees in this tradition a growing acceptance of contingency, i.e., awareness on the part of theorists of a diminishing ability to speak (plausibly speak) about reality. Philosophers slowly move from what they think is talk about reality, to talk about ideas, and eventually, to talk about vocabularies. The ancients focused on the world, the schoolmen on God, the Enlightenment on ideas, and the contemporary period on words.

Still, as Richard Bernstein explains, the critique of correspondence does not lead, inexorably, to the embrace of social consensus as the only acceptable means of justification. Correspondence, or agreement with a realm of objective facts, it should be noted, does actually work in certain straightforward cases. For example, if we disagree about the weather, we have one sound method at our disposal that is capable of ending the dispute; we can go outside and look. If I say it is raining and you dispute my claim, I will admit that I am wrong when I go outside and see the sky is blue and the sun is shining. The appeal of correspondence—or agreement with a realm of objective facts—is highlighted further by the common sense intuition that most of us would have in basic instances such as this. After all, regardless of what we say

[190] Rorty also argues that there is no longer any need for a special discipline called philosophy whose job it is to inspect statements to see which ones are true. Rorty's critics (e.g., Richard Bernstein) think this definition of philosophy is too narrow. Moreover, it posits an either/or dichotomy that they reject.

about truth, language, and history, I do not want a surgeon who actually behaves as if the word "red" does not actually refer to something in the external world that we have all been calling red (Rorty thinks of this as coping with the world, not copying it).

Moreover, as Taylor points out, we may say: yesterday there were twelve chairs in the room; today we only see ten. Here the language of classification is the same; "what has changed is the reality described." And, less trivially, Aristotle holds that the sun is a planet; we understand it not to be. "What brings about the change is not reality, but our adopting a different scheme."[191] Rorty is intent on driving a wedge between word and thing. This leads to arguments concerning meaning, which depend on the flattening of the distinction between scheme and content. But such an analysis of knowledge, as Taylor understands it, takes us back to the mediational view in which we cannot say, with certainty, what is in a person's head when she uses a word (a linguistic version of the Cartesian epistemological skepticism with respect to idea (in the mind) and object (in the external world).

Of course, not all knowledge claims can be settled by appeal to objective facts. When dealing with scientific, moral, or historical claims, it is not clear what the objective facts are that will settle the issue. Still, correspondence or agreement has an intuitive plausibility that strikes some theorists as essential, i.e., when making truth claims, the belief that there must be some sort of objective reality out there (however difficult it may be to ascertain), is an idea that, they think, must be defended. Failure to do so, they fear, leads to an unacceptable form of relativism that makes all assertions equally plausible.

[191] Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 173.

This realist conviction takes us "closer to the heart of the problem." As Bernstein explains:

> If we affirm that there is a close relation between our understanding of truth and objectivity and our "justificatory praxis," what precisely is it?...There are those who believe that whatever difficulties we may discover with traditional correspondence or agreement theories, no philosophical theory is acceptable that fails to do justice to the intuition that there is an objective reality "out there," and that what we count as genuine knowledge must somehow correctly represent this as objective reality. But there are those who argue that this way of posing the problem leads to dead-ends and aporias. If we are to give a proper account of objectivity, we must give up on any and all forms of representationalism; we must appeal to intersubjective (or better social) justificatory practices.[192]

So agreement is an idea that makes sense even though such a claim strains credulity in certain instances. But the conclusion Rorty draws—the one he understands to follow the lessons received from Kant and Hegel—is that we should get rid of "truths" and "facts" and "objectivity" altogether in favor of the idea of social "solidarity."[193] This is not simply to locate the ground in the social world—something pragmatists do that still allows experience to serve as a justificatory norm—, it is to locate the ground in conversational agreement. Solidarity points to human consensus thus making us answerable to our fellows and not to the world. The fear that some theorists have, and I share these concerns, is that the community can be just as wrong as an individual. If justification exists only in the local human consensus, we may, it seems, be required to accept, as moral, practices that we believe should be condemned using language that is stronger than the rebuke with which Rorty's linguistic historicism leaves us; we may wish to say more than simply: "Well, that is not how we do it here."

[192] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 109.
[193] Ibid., 110.

So with Kant and Hegel, according to the history as Rorty understands it, we see a transitional period in which intellectuals began, consciously, to relinquish what they thought was an ability to talk about how things really are (an ability Rorty would say we never had in the first place).[194] One step away from representation occurs with Kant's categories. The twelve categories do not yield absolute certainty, insofar as our ideas correspond to an external material world, but they are still thought to tell us the *form* that experience must take. David Hume's necessary connection is located, by Kant, in the way the human mind organizes the noumenal world into the phenomenal world of experience. We "knowers" do not get accurate knowledge of the world in itself, but we do get accurate knowledge in the sense that representations are structured by our minds. In a sense, the mind does not conform to the world; the world conforms to the mind.[195]

Idealism sees this as an unacceptable severing of the connection between the mind and the world. Being content to talk about the phenomenal world, and accepting that the world in itself is forever beyond our reach, is a positon against which idealists fight. Rorty accepts the severing of the Rational links between reality and our talk about reality, but he argues that moving beyond the tradition of metaphysics requires us to finally cut those last remaining ties to Enlightenment thought that still cause us to think of truth as correspondence to "something" real in the external world—something that has nothing to do with the contingencies of language and

[194] Rorty identifies our awareness of our own contingency as one of the defining characteristics of an ironist. Although Rorty is critical of Hegel and the Idealists, he does find the traces of ironist philosophy in Hegel.
[195] I will discuss Hume and Kant in greater detail below. John McDowell's ideas of world-directness and answerability combine the impressions of Hume with the concepts of Kant in a minimalist empiricism that emphasizes the role of experience. McDowell opposes linguistic conceptions of knowledge that make us answerable not to the way things are, but rather only to other people who share our common linguistic practices. But, in the picture of the history of philosophy that Rorty is describing, the antirepresentationalist view of language emerges as a kind of "natural" development once correspondence drops out of the picture.

culture. But unlike his critics, Rorty thinks it best to avoid the sorts of epistemological skepticism we see in the tradition of Western metaphysics by refusing to answer the skeptic. His intention is to dissolve the problem rather than solve it.[196]

Rorty's critique of foundationalist epistemology relies on the insights we find in Sellars, about givenness, as well as the Quinean idea of indeterminacy of meaning that surfaces in discourse about universal standards. But Rorty's disquotationalism, as he explains, leaves little room even for a concept of truth.[197] Justification, it turns out, is not internally related to either objectivity or truth—solidarity, or what our fellows allow us to *say*, is the only relevant consideration.[198] Even so, Rorty's employment of these ideas frequently evinces, what appears

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[196] Donald Davidson credits Rorty with showing him that "I should not pretend that I am answering the sceptic when I am really telling him to get lost." See, Donald Davidon, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and knowledge," in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan R. Malachowski (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990), 134.

[197] The hackneyed example is "snow is white" if and only if, snow is white. In short, Rorty focuses on the conditions that obtain as we use sentences rather than on correspondence to Reality. McDowell thinks that Tarski's example requires, at least, a minimalist empiricism in order to make sense of snow actually being white (and an assumption of external realism).

[198] Rorty's disquotationalism sees, "John smells roses," and "it is true that John smells roses," as equivalents. The word true does not add anything. In a discussion with Donald Davidson, Rorty confesses to being bothered by the "Platonic" overtones of the word true. Philosophers who treat the concept of truth as something central are, in his view, enamored with "patterns" of rationality they think they have discovered. Rorty's deflationary approach holds that what is actually happening is much simpler. Whenever a group of people get together to "do things" we will see "sixteen different patterns" of rationality. True becomes a concept like cause, but if we look at how we use words on an ordinary everyday basis, we will see that "true" is not really that useful. But Davidson, who shares a similar Wittgensteinian perspective, disagrees. He responds to Rorty's observations saying, "you don't even know what a belief is if you don't have the concept of truth." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCwbPDnN_yU (accessed August 27, 2016). I think Rorty's tendency to see philosophical problems as merely linguistic problems is part of the disagreement between him and his critics. Aside from the bookishness of such a view of truth, I think it presupposes that all awareness is linguistic. Certainly it is true that we cannot speak about things that are not in our language (I have in mind Heidegger's citing of Stefan Georg's statement: "Where word breaks off no thing can be"). But I take Heidegger to be saying that language allows us to understand and talk about what we *experience*—I emphasize this because words are not the only things we experience. This, I take it, is what Bernstein means when he criticizes Rorty's pragmatism on the grounds that his does not emphasize experience. We speak about things that become meaningful (or intelligible) as we speak about them. However, a crying baby for example, presents us with a non-linguistic experience. It is a part of Being, but it becomes a meaningful part of Being as we speak about it. With McDowell we might add that meaning has something to do with the relationship between mind and world, rather than just the sort of justification we produce once we have "programmed ourselves with a language" as Rorty says. This is important because the felt sense of urgency or discomfort we might feel (a raw feel that receptivity makes part of my experience) is also part of our experience of Being (which involves both raw feels and the external world). Talking about a felt sense or a mood is not an attempt to talk about a Cartesian mind or a reservoir of "stuff"

to be a linguistic treatment of knowledge that plays a dual role: It (1) shows how to replace the "is-claims" of correspondence metaphysics with the "looks-claims" of his linguistic pragmatism and it (2) points the way toward what he hopes will be greater social solidarity once we have dropped the requirements of correspondence. In the view Rorty recommends, our awareness of our own contingency leads to a confident embrace of linguistic redescription in which the hope for metaphysical comfort withers as we realize that truth is "made" rather than "found."

3.1 Epistemological Skepticism and Common Sense Doubts

Since reason cannot make truth claims that have context-transcending validity, the frank "ethnocentrism" Rorty recommends allows us to affirm "our" values without attempting to provide any additional grounds for them.[199] On might imagine how such a "common sense" pragmatist view of social practices—vocabularies in Rorty—might have shocked earlier theorists, even those who thought it proper to modify our demands for absolute certainty in every area of philosophical inquiry. Kant, for example, thought that theoretical problems required more than a common sense solution—common sense requires a theoretical back-up. As Kant explains:

> Matters are, if possible, even worse with the *appeal to sound common sense*, if the discussion concerns concepts and principles, not insofar as they are supposed to be valid with respect to experience, but rather insofar as they are to be taken as valid beyond the conditions of experience. For what is *sound common sense*? It is the *ordinary understanding*, insofar as it judges correctly. And what now is the

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inside as Rorty sees Descartes and Nietzsche doing. The difference is between the Cartesian raw feel becoming linguistic without being purely linguistic. But this means that our moods and raw feels fall on both sides of the cause/justification dualism. I think Rorty conflates these two and treats inner feels and convictions as if they are in fact linguistic and nothing more (at least nothing more in any interesting sense of the word.

[198] Richard Rorty, "Is There a Problem about Fictional Discourse?" in his *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 110.

[199] *CIS*, 198.

> ordinary understanding? It is the faculty of cognition and of the use of rules *in concreto*, as distinguished from the *speculative understanding*, which is a faculty of the cognition of rules *in abstracto*. Common sense, or ordinary understanding, will hardly be able to understand the rule: that everything which happens is determined by its cause, and it will never be able to have insight into it in such a general way.[200]

One cannot insist dogmatically on the testimony of common sense as did Common Sense Realists such as Thomas Reid. Assertions of fact, as if one can make such assertions true through the sheer force of one's will (a brute force assertion), run the risk of affirming ideological forms of consciousness by eschewing theory. But Rorty argues that justification is never anything more than the local practices in a community—concrete practical activities in which all members of a linguistic community engage on an everyday basis. We speak about how things seem in our society and our fellows, those around us who already share the same values, agree or disagree with the validity of our pronouncements. In this sense, Rorty's linguistic historicism is both practical and theoretical. It is a critique of foundationalist epistemology that emphasizes concrete speaking, but there is also an ontological dimension to Rorty's pragmatism: We understand through language and we control our descriptions of the "reality" that we come to care about.[201]

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[200] Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, trans. Gary Hatfield (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 120.

[201] If a person understands antifoundationalist critics to offer recommendations concerning how we can proceed into the future (given the fact that foundationalist epistemology has failed to connect justification to anything other than local linguistic practices), then my analysis may seem to be missing the point. However, I do not read Rorty as offering merely "therapeutic" recommendations for productive, future conversations. I think Rorty, in spite of his insistence to the contrary, is offering us a theory of knowledge in which hermeneutics does become the "successor subject" to foundationalist epistemology. So, I read his recommendations, not as therapeutic suggestions, but as meta-philosophical critiques of knowledge made from an antifoundationalist perspective than, at times, presents itself as a "view from nowhere." I realize that complaints such as this, i.e., criticizing theorists for (1) failing to account for their presuppositions, (2) advancing non-sequiturs, or (3) failing to solve the problem of the self-referential inconsistency (and producing arguments that contain performative contradictions), can lead to unproductive finger-pointing (*tu quoque*) that solves nothing. But I also realize that these sound logical arguments are an important part of rational persuasion. We want a plausible argument, but we do not focus so much on

3.2 Moving Beyond the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

Rorty's treatment of knowledge, one that emphasizes the historicist implications he sees inherent in the linguistic turn, yields the conclusion that any statement about how things are is an attempt to distinguish between interpretations and facts (one more example of the Naturalistic Fallacy—one that attempts to bride the divide between causes and justifications). But the relativism that ensues, provided that justification remains on one side of this divide perpetually, cuts us off from the external world in ways that positivists would not have welcomed (even though they had shown that most of the things thought to be true were in fact the result of metaphysical constructs with which we should dispense). Even Quine, whose "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951) undermines the pretenses of logical empiricism by collapsing the analytic/synthetic distinction, still thinks that naturalism leaves a place for some distinctions between the language of science and everything else.

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potential fallacies that we miss the importance of what pragmatists traditionally focus on: the affects our criticism of knowledge has in our daily lives. Here the effects I see (an extreme relativism in Rorty that strikes me as undesirable and problematic, not because it contains non sequiturs, but rather because it does not allow our criticism of bad ideas to be rational or objective) have the sorts of negative consequences that I think should be addressed through examination of the presuppositions Rorty makes about the Linguistic Turn—presuppositions about the cause/justification distinction the underlie his private/public split. If Rorty is right, if every statement is equally valid (potentially), if everything is equally ideological or an example of what some people might call "media spin-control," then I think the cash-value of such an approach to knowledge is low. So, in an effort to avoid unproductive accusations, I am treating Rorty's criticism of foundationalism as one that, in our everyday lives, requires us to lower our expectations concerning justification and accept that the constraints on our interpretations can never be more that what we can call merely conversational constraints. I think this view cuts off all perspectives from experiential and empirical considerations and makes every interpretation equally valid in the sense that we no longer connect truth, objectivity, and justification to the sorts of statements we regard as knowledge. It is for these reasons that I am reluctant to accept that foundationalism has *completely* failed and that approaches such as Rorty's are now the ones with which we will have to make do. I mention in the introduction above that Rorty's use of psychological nominalism depicts metal states as both material structures as well as linguistic constructs with an agreed upon meaning. This pragmatic and Wittgensteinian dimension of Rorty's thought is a response to the legacy of Cartesian metaphysics replete with the idea that human consciousness is something special. In the manner of classical pragmatists, Rorty focuses on the consequences of our holding a belief in such and such rather than thinking about whether the belief represents, correctly, a true thing. But this also has the effect of making talk about motives suspect in that such talk seems to presuppose the existence of "something" inside that causes the action (whether we consider a physical movement designed to bring about a desired effect or a statement about how things seem in the external world). I discuss this issue with Searle's idea of external realism and McDowell's use of Kant's idea of spontaneity.

Ironically, both Rorty and McDowell criticize Quine for this, but for different reasons. McDowell is critical of the nature/reason dualism he sees in Rorty, Quine, and in positivism in general, but he is not trying to get rid of the distinction between the logical space of nature (the realm of law) and the logical space of reasons. So to an extent, McDowell retains an important assumption of Kant's—one that Rorty criticizes—that understands reason to function on two levels. McDowell admits to this and labels it a form of "platonism" in the sense that reason operates, to some extent, in a "higher" realm or independently of the natural realm of law.[202] However, he qualifies this by saying that, while separate, the realm of law and the space of reasons, are in intimate contact. McDowell is concerned not to commit the Naturalistic Fallacy by falling back into the Myth of the Given, but he also wants to maintain, in opposition to Rorty's claim, that Truth involves world-directedness and objectivity. By imbuing Humean impressions with concepts, he avoids the Given. This allows him to think of material objects not as things that "jump" directly into our minds, unmediated by concepts, but as entities that already have conceptual structure.

The nature/reason dualism of Rorty does not permit an understanding empirical knowledge in this manner. It identifies nature with the realm of law. By naturalizing reason in this manner, Rorty and Quine fail to see how our modern scientific understanding of the world identifies reason with the natural and removes conceptual capacities from spontaneity. But in Rorty's view, Quine's naturalization of reason (what McDowell calls "bald naturalism" as opposed to the naturalism for which he advocates), still retains reductionist and correspondence tendencies. Rorty criticizes him for this. As such, Rorty thinks Quine gives "priority" to the

[202] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 72. McDowell uses the lower case "p" to signify, what he regards as, an acceptable form of Platonic thinking.

"language of physics" by espousing views that reveal a latent correspondence presupposition—that some language-games still get us closer to "how things are."[203] McDowell agrees with Rorty, but he thinks Quine's "half-hearted attempt" to show that receptivity can rationally interact with spontaneity does not go far enough.[204] If we can see our way clear to saying that causes (which act on and are received through the faculty of receptivity) and justifications (which involve awareness—and in some cases action by a human agent who understands the content of receptivity) are interacting rationally (that our beliefs stand in a rational relationship to how things are), then we can say what Quine wanted to say but could not. For McDowell, the issue is whether or not we can speak, in a meaningful way, about the objective world while avoiding the Myth of the Given, on the one hand, and Rorty's antireferentialist and "frictionless" spinning in the void on the other. The issue is this: Is there anything that crosses over the cause/justification divide?[205]

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[203] *PSH*, 143. I do not mean to suggest that Quine or Rorty share the concerns that McDowell has about the severing of all connections between mind and world. What I am suggesting is that Quine tacitly assumes that we are not dealing simply with vocabularies (although in almost every case we are). This is why, in my view, Rorty criticizes him. One can certainly say that our understanding of "vocabularies" as alternative forms of discourse remove from consideration any form of correspondence, but with McDowell, I am arguing that such a view of vocabularies ignores an important connection between mind and world—that the idea of linguistic redescription shifts our of our understanding of knowledge (especially the importance of our realist intuitions) the possible role that empiricism still plays.

[204] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 141.

[205] This has implications for moral as well as for scientific knowledge claims. The issue concerns whether or not we experience constraints that stem from non-linguistic entities. Positivists were dismissive of moral language since statements concerning "ought" language contain no empirically verifiable entities. Post-positivist linguist philosophy, while under-cutting empiricism and hence leaving space for ethics, also jerks the rug, so to speak, out from under rational ethical discourse by making all forms of inquiry, narratives that are grounded in nothing more that the conversational grounds we happen to inherit, and as such, the space it leaves for ethics makes the external world and the content of receptivity a mystery. Foundationalists do not take comfort in either positivism nor in postmodern linguistic or post-positivist thought. Positivism, through the use of theories of meaning such as verificationism and falsifiability, paints a picture of knowledge that, while stressing an antimetaphysicalism that resonates with postmodernist critics of foundationalist epistemology, relegates the humanities to the realm of the subjective. Here positivists see "literary criticism" in the same vein as Cartesian metaphysics. Both utilize equally meaningless terms. Whether we are talking about moral goodness, Cartesian souls and innate ideas, Derridean différence, or Heideggerian phrases such as "The Nothing nothings," what we have are statements whose alleged meaning is located, not in empirically verifiable experience, but in the private, subjective realm. This sort of

3.3 Neither Frictionless nor Given: Norms and the Space of Reasons

After the Linguistic Turn in philosophy we see similar views, concerning the idea of friction, expressed by critics of Rorty's post-positivist, linguistic pragmatism (e.g. Taylor, Searle, Habermas, and Bernstein). They think a post-metaphysical ground is still possible. Although they have their differences with positivism, they think that some sort of "metaphysical" ground is necessary for human knowledge—that the separation of private and public Rorty offers, while insisting that emancipation is still possible without any reconciliation, is a mistake. However, they do not agree about what sorts of "metaphysical" theories we should avoid. The former (positivists) regard both literary and Cartesian thought as forms of metaphysical thought we could do without, while the latter (Rorty's critics mentioned above) find that the Enlightenment conception of reason still has something of value to offer. They acknowledge the "world-creating capacity of language" without openly celebrating it or arguing that the problem-solving capacity of language disappears against "the reign of universal hermeneutics."[206] Whereas the latter,Rorty and post-positivist intellectuals, find that literary conceptions are the most preferable. In fact, the deflationary tactics they utilize, flatten and relativize the landscape to such an extent that we are left with a view that demotes philosophy to the status of just another form of

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discourse is regarded by positivists as metaphysical and it moves us back, in the view of "bald naturalists," to the private, Cartesian realm that privileges conscious reflection. See Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn, *Doing Philosophy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2006), 94. The authors use this statement from Martin Heidegger's *What is Metaphysics*? as an example of, what Rudolf Carnap would call, a meaningless statement.

[206] Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), 205-07; Habermas argues that Derrida "overgeneralizes…one linguistic function—namely, the poetic," and that "[l]inguistically mediated processes…involve mastering problems posed by the world." I take this to mean that humanism requires a "ground" that acknowledges the world-directedness of human knowledge. Although I use Habermas in this dissertation as an example of the sort of "metaphysician" Rorty criticizes (and Rorty does call him a metaphysician), Habermas does not repudiate linguistic theory in favor of world-directedness or McDowell's minimalist empiricism. This is probably due to Habermas's determination to avoid falling back into philosophy of the subject. As Karl-Otto Apel has observed, Habermas seems more concerned to avoid the word metaphysics than to actually avoid doing what is implied by metaphysics; Charles Taylor, "Understanding in Human Science," *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. 34, no. 1 (Sep., 1980), 26.

narrative creation; philosophy is no longer the queen of the sciences. By removing the constraints thought to be placed on us by either the Empirical World or by the universal and Rational requirements of reason, we are left with what McDowell refers to above as the frictionless spinning in the void. Philosophy's role has been usurped by literature and, since there is no "real" difference between philosophy and literature in the first place, it is language and not empirical inquiry that determines what comes to be seen as reality. Again, as Rorty tells us, we speak, but the world does not. The cause/justification divide places philosophy in the logical space of reason. But this, in Rorty's understanding, means that philosophy no longer retains its connection to a mind-independent realm (the space of nature) making philosophy just another form of narrative creation.

Theorists sympathetic to the Enlightenment project, and to some form of post-metaphysical grounding for our humanist principles, see this sort of leveling as dependent upon a critique of reason that relies too much on a literary conception of knowledge—a conception borrowed from the humanities that relies heavily, as Rorty's does, on a questionable use of the linguistic turn. Foundationalist critics think his argument hides a clever trope that never gets spelled-out completely. In short, the argument tries to make this private, solipsistic realm, an individual's final vocabulary—the space or reasons where interpretation happens—look respectable through a linguistic view of knowledge that flattens and relativizes common sense distinctions between the disciplines and cuts us off from any recourse to the objective, external world.[207] Rorty's linguistic pragmatism rescues "literary" conceptions of knowledge while

[207] See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 151. McDowell suggests that Rorty's coherentism contains an unacceptable subjectivist dimension, although Rorty does not defend it as such, but rather he chooses to plug "his ears" and not listen to complaints that limiting one's analysis to "linguistic behavior" fails to take notice of spontaneity and the belief we have, as we make claims, that there exists an objective world not of my own making. Moreover, it makes

retaining the critique of correspondence he originally garners from his positivist training. The linguistic bent of post-positivist intellectuals, ironists with whom Rorty came to identify, along with the "Quine's rebellion," usher in the "crisis of logical positivism/empiricism in the 1950s"—a crises which Rorty argues leads to the Linguistic Turn.[208] What emerges is an approach to knowledge, due to its situating of reason, truth and justification in the same sphere where aesthetic reason creates novels, that makes any distinction in kind between science and pseudo-science impossible. This outcome is welcomed neither by those sympathetic to a minimalist empiricism (e.g., John McDowell) nor by those sympathetic to that subjective dimension associated with the rationalist metaphysics of Descartes—a dimension McDowell, Taylor, Searle, and McCarthy argue is not subjective since it already contains concepts that we employ as we talk about the our social lives together. Rather than celebrating the creativity of the interpreter, these critics would like to retain an ability to refer to "facts" without falling back into an unacceptable form of correspondence metaphysics.[209]

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the empirical content of our beliefs a mystery—that contents of introspection cannot stand in rational relations to the external world if we only focus on linguistic behavior as if such behavior consists of the production of noises that are not supplemented by a normative story—one that is connected to the "noises" we make. We are aware of "something" introspectively, but in order to keep intuitions and concepts separate, this something must remain a mystery until it receives linguistic expression (or it is mysterious how it can receive expression since justification has nothing to do with the space of nature. Quoting Rorty, McDowell says, Rorty tell us, "without ceremony, that if 'seems paradoxical' to suggest that 'There are rocks' is implied by 'At the ideal end of inquiry, we shall be justified in asserting that there are rocks,' because 'there seems no obvious reason why the progress of the language-game we are playing should have anything in particular to do with the way the rest of the world is.' But that is an extraordinary thing to say. It is the whole point of the idea of norms of inquiry that following them ought to improve our chances of being right about 'the way the rest of the world is.' If following what pass for norms of inquiry turns out not to improve our chances of being right about the world, that just shows we need to modify our conception of the norms of inquiry. Rorty implies that to say that sort of thing is to succumb to the attractions of traditional philosophy."

[208] See, Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1-12.

[209] Zammito, 3. I am using rationalist rather loosely here, but I think it is appropriate since Rorty's linguistic pragmatism depends on a strict separation, and possibly a kind of dualism between reason and nature or, as Rorty analyses it, language/justification and nature (logical space of nature). See McDowell, *Mind and World*, 153-156. Both Searle and Taylor want to retain a modicum of personal introspection—an ability they think we need for our

3.4 Propositional Knowledge and the Rationalist/Empiricist Legacy

The shift from conceptual to propositional knowledge started in the nineteenth century with Gottlob Frege.[210] The "dominance" of logical empiricism, a fact that many opponents of positivism bemoaned during the first half of the twentieth century, came to a rather abrupt end, according to Charles Taylor. Like McDowell, Taylor wishes to skate between the same two poles: The Myth of the Given and Linguistic Idealism. What we see in this change is analogous to the shift from rationalism to empiricism and back to rationalism again but this time in the form of a linguistic approach to knowledge that threatens to sever the rational link between mind and world. As Taylor notes:

> This is an extraordinary reversal. Old-guard Diltheyans, their shoulders hunched from years-long resistance against the encroaching pressure of positivist natural science, suddenly pitch forward on their faces as all opposition ceases to the reign of universal hermeneutics. This is a pleasing fancy. Moreover, it has been supported by very insightful people with convincing argument. I think, for instance, of Mary Hesse ("In Defense of Objectivity," British Academy Lecture) and of one of our present symposiasts, Richard Rorty. But I think this is wrong.[211]

Taylor, and others sympathetic to the idea that humanist principles require safeguarding in a post-metaphysical ground, would have been criticized by radical empiricists just as they have been by post-positivist, language philosophers like Rorty. And, as fellow critic of the Linguistic Turn in philosophy Frank Verges echoes, "But whereas Rorty celebrates this state of affairs, viewing it as a vindication of William James's *aperçu* that the trail of the human serpent is everywhere, both Taylor and his co-hermeneuticist, Hubert Dreyfus, balk at such an unqualified

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statements to count as rational. Rorty calls this metaphysics, but the aforementioned thinkers see the denial of its necessity for genuine thought as a form of non-realism.

[210] See Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 2.

[211] Charles Taylor, "Understanding in Human Science," 26.

universalization of the hermeneutical phenomenon."[212] Yet, neither Taylor nor Rorty want to revisit the old Rationalist/Empiricist debate, still Rorty's sharp distinction between causes and justifications forces them to do so in a sense. Their disagreement concerns the need for, and the possibility of, a rational ground for humanism, in light of the implications that the linguistic turn has for foundationalist epistemology.

Part of Taylor's criticism is that, in his eagerness to move beyond epistemological skepticism, Rorty actually accepts, unwittingly, much of its understanding of what knowledge is. Specifically, Taylor sees representationalism present in both Rorty's treatment of knowledge as well as in the language of objectivity which both he and Rorty desire to move beyond. Taylor does not understand Rorty's pragmatism to offer "therapy," rather it takes the requirements of knowledge (and our inability to meet those standards) so seriously that his pragmatism ends up accepting more of the tradition's prejudices concerning knowledge than one might suspect. More specifically, Taylor sees Rorty's "non-realism" as a product of the tradition he is rejecting rather than a way out of the tradition of epistemology. As a palliative, Taylor recommends what he calls an "uncompromising realism."[213]

Taylor is sympathetic to the criticism McDowell raises concerning Rorty's coherentism; however, Taylor's approach is different. He does not speak of sensibility containing conceptual structure, as does McDowell, but we can understand Taylor's analysis of background and foreground knowledge as a hermeneutical holism (as opposed to the holism of Quine) that "crosses-over" the cause/justification divide nonetheless. "Rorty's whole approach," according

[212] Frank Verges, "Rorty and the New Hermeneutics," *Philosophy* vol. 62, no 241 (July 1987), 314.
[213] Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition,"258.

to Taylor, "fails to take account of what has come, in modern philosophy, to be called the 'background,' the skein of semi- or utterly inarticulate understandings that make sense of our explicit thinking and reactions."[214] A holism in the tradition of Quine, Davidson, and Rorty reflects too much of the earlier positivist idea of verification. In Taylor's view, representations become issues for us with respect to a whole background of experiences that are not propositional and cannot be isolated from other experiences in the ways that the foundationalist epistemology has done historically. Taylor sees elements of this tradition from Descartes and Locke all the way up through Davidson and Rorty.

In echoing McDowell's critical tone, Taylor draws our attention to the strangeness of an antirepresentationalism that collapses the distinction between background and foreground. What McDowell is calling coherentism, Taylor can be understood to criticize as a form of non-realism. "Nothing is gained and much is lost," Taylor observes, "if we collapse this crucial distinction between foreground and background, the articulate and the inarticulate, as the modern epistemological tradition has always done. It is because Davidson's and I believe also Rorty's attempt just to walk away from representations leaves the distinction collapsed, because they still think in terms of sentences, that they remain trapped, in my view, under the canvas."[215]

There are, Taylor explains, many things in what Rorty calls the Descartes-Kant period of epistemology to criticize; yet, Taylor maintains, moral language can still be said to have rational force—that such discourse is not grounded solely in the communicative constraints imposed on us by our linguistic communities as Rorty contends. Taylor argues that such a view evinces a

[214] Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 159.
[215] Ibid., 159.

"non-realism" that makes genuine moral statements, which he thinks are about obligations that we believe we actually do have in reality—, not final vocabularies we choose to employ aside from what is going on in the natural world—look mysterious or meaningless.[216]

But in order to move beyond the epistemological tradition, an aspiration he shares with Rorty, Taylor recommends a philosophical "coping" program designed to fill the gap after the failure of Cartesian-Lockean representational theories. What the framework of philosophy-as-epistemology misses (or represses) is that our representations come to the fore in a framework that is underpinned by our ability

> to cope with our world in a host of ways: from our capacity as bodily beings to make our way around in our surroundings, picking up, using, avoiding, and leaning on things to our knowing as social beings how relate to and interact with friends, strangers, lovers, children, and so on. These capacities are distorted if we try to construe them as the having of mere representations; they are rather what allows the representation we do form, the sentences we do articulate, the words and images we exchange to make the sense that they do.[217]

But here too Taylor thinks that Rorty's metaphilosophical interests—which he characterizes as propositional or comprised of sentences—cause him to miss other important forms of knowledge that cannot be relegated to the space of reasons where justification depends solely on the contingent forms of linguistic socialization that produce our background understandings.

It is with respect to these issues that Taylor treats the rise of linguistic philosophy. Moreover, it is ironic, and this is the conclusion that I draw from my reading of Taylor, that a

[216] Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," 258. The whole point of having standards is that we have a mark, not of own creation, to which we aspire. Rorty's humanism understands this as another form of metaphysical thinking, a desire for a God who will make us correct. But Taylor does not think such a conception of ethics captures the obligatory nature of norms that a person actually believes to be valid. A person who claims to feel guilt for her failure to live-up to a standard that she also admits she chose (and could just as easily have done the opposite), would be mentally unstable.
[217] Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 159.

staunch, dogmatic form of empiricism gets challenged twice, first in the eighteenth century and again in the twentieth century. And, each time, it is the unquestioned presuppositions of empiricists that are exposed by theorists who notice the presence of beliefs or concepts that play a role in empiricist thinking but which are not accounted for in their analysis of knowledge (e.g., the difference for positivists between observational and theoretical statements, an idea that develops out of the Hegelian distinction between concepts and sense certainty).[218] Taylor notes the similarities pointing out, through a playful reference to the credit Kant gives Hume for arousing him from his rationalistic slumber, how the demise of positivism mirrors the earlier demise of empiricism:

> But, the new thesis goes, this distinction disappears once we realize that the logical empiricists sold us an extraordinary bill of goods about natural science. Once we awaken from our *positivist slumbers* [italics mine] we realize that none of these features hold of natural science either. The two turn out to be methodologically at one, not for the positivist reason that there is no rational place for hermeneutics; but for the radically opposed reason that all sciences are equally hermeneutic.[219]

Taylor does not think we can defend the positivist distinction between rational and empirical statements but neither does he think it correct to say, as Rorty will, that there is no difference between philosophy and literature (a view that, for Rorty, draws on the collapsing of the distinction between scheme and content). For Taylor, foundationalists are in the same position in which Dilthey had been; initially, they had to push against empiricists who sought to rob them of

[218] I have in mind Kant's transcendental ego in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and the rise of historicism and the hermeneutic circle in twentieth century. See, for example, Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). In both cases, empirical observation is thought to be affected by the "thinking" in which we are already engaged. The categories shape our experience in Kant and the paradigm/pre-understandings shape our interpretations in hermeneutics.
[219] Charles Taylor, "Understanding in Human Science,"26.

their ability to make meaningful moral and political statements (given that, as empiricists understood matters, meaningful statements require some sort of empirical verification).

But two centuries later we see positivists like Rudolf Carnap, A.J. Ayer, and Karl Popper recommending similar conceptions of meaning that also have detrimental effects on conceptions of moral/political knowledge that theorists such as Taylor favor. Echoing Hume's empiricist outlook, Ayer argues that words like "good" may have emotive meaning, but since the word does not refer to anything empirically verifiable, it can have only emotive meaning. To say that that "stealing is wrong," is to say that one does not approve or like stealing. It is, in terms of meaning, no different than saying, "Rats! Stealing." It expresses an attitude and has emotive meaning, but nothing more.[220]

The reaction to empiricist metaphysics, in Hume's day and in the twentieth century, results in a theoretical backlash that aims to make look good, what previously had been suggested as tender for the flames (by Hume). As Dudley Shapere points out, these presuppositions about knowledge caused positivists "to view the distinction between observational and theoretical as paralleling a distinction between existent and non-existent

[220] A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), 107-08. Not all theorists sympathetic to empiricism draw the same conclusions as Ayer nor do they presuppose the validity of the verification principle. See R.M. Hare, *The Language of Morals*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), 144-145. Hare says, "When we use the word 'good' in order to commend morally, we are always directly or indirectly commending *people*. Even when we use the expression 'good act' or others like it, the reference is indirectly to human characters. This, as has often been pointed out, constitutes a difference between the words 'good' and 'right'. In speaking, therefore, of moral goodness, I shall speak only of the expression 'good man' and similar expressions. We have to consider whether in fact this expression has the same logical features as the non-moral uses of 'good' which we have been discussing, remembering that clearly 'man' in 'good man' is not normally a functional word, and never so when moral commendation is being given."

entities."[221] Rorty almost speaks this way too, but he frequently stops short of making such explicit assertions about "how things really are." He prefers to take what he calls an ironic stance regarding the actual existence of entities—distinctions on which, in the end, he thinks nothing really "useful" hangs. But if his view dispenses too quickly with all forms of empirical thinking in favor of "vocabularies," then I think we are losing what could still serve as non-linguistic grounds for moral/political knowledge. It is not that we cannot "get at" a problem linguistically, rather it is the idea, in Rorty, that all attempts to make us answerable to the world is of a piece with the attempt to make us answerable to God.

This means, as McDowell explains, that the biological, material dimensions of personhood will be neglected in a theory of society that focuses too much on linguistic acts. Since justification, as Rorty maintains, has nothing to do with the physical impacts arising materially from within the logical space of nature, issues such as exploitation become "linguistic" issues rather than issues concerning material deprivation (or the word exploitation to the extent that it becomes synonymous with words such as unjust or morally wrong). Rorty, of course, would deny holding any such "subjectivist" view, but I think such a reading follows from his nature/reason dichotomy, a view that "removes" the world from the content of our beliefs. As Barry Allen, a former student of Rorty's notes, "McDowell moves in a direction pioneered by Aristotle, systematized by Aquinas, modernized by Kant, and reclaimed from subjectivism by Heidegger." McDowell's treatment of experience, his emphasis on openness to "manifest facts"

[221] Dudley Shapere, "Notes toward a Post-positivist Interpretation of Science, Part I," in *Reason and the Search for Knowledge: Investigation in the Philosophy of Science*, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science 78 (Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel Publishing Company, 1984), 102-19, citing 104, in John Zammito, 11.

within the world as these "impress themselves on one's sensibility," makes McDowell, in Allen's view, "the most 'heideggerian' of English philosophers."[222]

And again, in Rorty's terms, we see that the world can cause us to believe that our fellows are being exploited, but what we see, hear, or feel does not justify our belief that the given social arrangements are wrong. McDowell argues that what we need is to recover the Aristotelian understanding of a person as a rational animal and that what we receive through sensibility is not merely a cause. The fear here, and this is what I think motivates charges of relativism and subjectivism against Rorty, is that causal connections are contingent. It follows that, ultimately, we can say anything about the "world" since the statements are constructed from within the *sui generis* space of reasons that admits of no real or Rational connection to the external world. It is this view in Rorty, what Allen calls "the hermeneutics of radical interpretation" that leads to fears over subjectivism and linguistic idealism.[223] Drawing a comparison between Gadamerian hermeneutics and the work of Karl Marx on this issue, McDowell notes:

> Gadamer's account of how a merely animal life, lived in an environment, differs from a properly human life, lived in the world, coincides strikingly with some of what Marx says in his 1844 manuscript on alienated labor. (Gadamer does not note the parallel). This convergence should help to exorcize the idea of the passive observer. For Marx, of course, a properly human life is nothing if not active…As in Gadamer's description, merely animal life is a matter of dealing with a series of problems and opportunities that the environment throws up, constituted as such by biologically given needs and drives. Marx complains memorably of a dehumanization of humanity in wage slavery.[224]

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[222] Barry Allen, "Epistemological friction: McDowell's Minimal Empiricism," in Mind and World: Essays on John McDowell's *Mind and World*, 14.
[223] Allen, 15.
[224] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 117-18.

Experience of an outer world of nature is not separate or "cut-off" from the inner subjective realm. But by placing justification within the space of reasons, we see a justificatory strategy that removes the "epistemological friction" from our interpretations and threatens to usher in a form of subjectivism. But it is this inner, subjective realm that Rorty subsumes under the heading "psychological nominalism." So whatever the testimony of introspection reveals, it can be "got at" linguistically and reduced to our society's conversation rather than understood in terms of a mind's relationship to an actually existing, unjust state of affairs. The only way for the human animal, in Rorty's treatment of the issue, to connect with experience—and to what McDowell calls "perceptual sensitivity"—is through the creative interpretations accessed linguistically in the logical space of reasons.

This, I take it, is a facet of Rorty's linguistic pragmatism that McDowell regards as frictionless. These *sui generis* language-games we play, the "irreducible" games that Rorty regards as "techniques for problem solving" rather than as forms of "intelligibility" as McDowell does, prevent attribution of any special empirical content to our beliefs (or world-directedness that has justificatory import) when we reflect on the existence of material deprivation.[225] Impressions, understood with an eye toward the Myth of the Given, are direct noninferential beliefs that depend solely on human receptivity. Understood this way, as Hegel had shown us earlier, these immediate impressions are impoverished. But in Rorty's hands, the logical space of nature becomes a realm that can only cause beliefs. Experience here is reinterpreted, through psychological nominalism, as *describable* with an alternate vocabulary—one that eliminates talk of the inner self (since Rorty's therapeutic—or deflationary—approach seeks to avoid talk of

[225] *TP*, 145.

how things are, the possibility that a "truth" can be described differently without losing anything is taken as proof of its status as inessential). Rorty understands this move beyond talk of the real as one that enables us also to avoid metaphysical talk about the self, that is, talk about the presuppositions of the self contained in what he calls the Cartesian "Glassy Essence." But McDowell's idea that our encounter with the world already contains concepts, that our interpretations are not frictionless and our experience is not merely passively received, presupposes a connection between mind and world that Rorty abjures. In short, to Rorty's ears, the whole idea of engaging the "world" as a "conversational partner"—a phrase Rorty uses to mock McDowell's view of experience—harkens back to the human nature talk characteristic of the tradition of Western metaphysics he wishes to avoid.[226]

3.5 McDowell's Answerability and Rorty's Conversational Constraints

Specifically, according to McDowell, we humans interpret, in the ways we do, because the faculty of spontaneity is subject to "rational constraint from outside."[227] McDowell agrees with Rorty, to an extent, and acknowledges that there are no concepts without language, but unlike Rorty, McDowell thinks that our encounter with the world does something to us through our capacity to receive inputs through sensibility. It is not simply the descriptions we chose to employ that shape our character and constitute what we think of as just. Our encounter with the world has something to say about this process as well. Through the faculty of spontaneity, and the acquisition of what McDowell calls "second nature," we exercise conceptual capacities with respect to the external world—not independently of it as Rorty holds due to his placing of

[226] *TP*, 147.
[227] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 15.

justification within the logical space of reasons. Or, to put this in McDowell's terms, our beliefs are rationally answerable to the world, not just to other people. For Rorty, such talk reinstitutes the divine authority the world has over human beings (science and reason—what the Enlightenment used as a replacement for God). But, as we have seen, Rorty understands the desire for truth as a desire for nonhuman or divine authority, one that makes justification a relation of correspondence to something other than the local human consensus. The argument about language, for Rorty, is an argument that strips the world of its authority by showing that concepts are words employed as tools in particular social contexts. Here the idea of divinity is reducible to authority. And concomitantly, McDowell's talk of answerability is, in Rorty's view, a desire to make us answerable to something other than to human beings. But Rorty's cause/justification distinction is so sharp, he misses (as McDowell explains) the ways in which human beings are "initiated into conceptual capacities" by our encounter with the world.[228] For

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[228] Ibid., xx. See *Mind and World*, 87. McDowell uses the German word *Bildung* to capture the idea that our upbringing works in tandem with the potentialities with which we were born to produce what he calls a second nature. In a paper delivered at the 2007 conference of the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, Jim Good tells us: "The German term *Bildung* dates to 16th century Pietistic theology, according to which, the devout Christian should seek to cultivate (*Bildung*) his talents and dispositions according to the image of God, which was innate in his soul. In addition to this theological usage, Paracelsus (1493-1591), Jakob Böhme (1575-1624), and Leibniz (1646-1716) also used the term in natural philosophy to refer to "the development or unfolding of certain potentialities within an organism." In the 18th century, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), the founding father of the Jewish Enlightenment, used the term in the sense of unfolding one's potential in an influential essay in 1784, "What is Enlightenment?," identifying *Bildung* with Enlightenment itself. Pedagogical theorists, like Joachim Heinrich Campe (1746-1818), also focused on how pedagogical reform could promote the development (*Ausbildung*) and education (*Bildung*) of the citizenry. By the end of the 18th century, *Bildung* was becoming a term with not only spiritual, but also philosophical and political connotations. Increasingly, *Bildung* was associated with liberation of the mind from tradition and superstition, but also liberation of the German people from a pre-modern political system of small feudal states that owed allegiance to the Holy Roman Empire. This political usage is apparent in the writings of Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803), in which he went beyond the sense of individual formation or development to the development of a people (*Volk*). For Herder, *Bildung* was the totality of experiences that provide a coherent identity, and sense of common destiny, to a people. Although Herder is rightfully associated with late-eighteenth-century German nationalism, he conceived the German *Volk* as including both royalty and peasants, envisioning a classless society. Accordingly, Herder's cultural nationalism required that social unity be promoted from the bottom up, in contrast to the top down political nationalism to which many historians have attributed the rise of German militarism that ultimately culminated in the Third Reich. Because of the quality of his

Rorty, talk of initiation is of piece with the metaphysician's desire to get behind the world (read: behind language) and see how things really are independent of our contingent ways of speaking.

So, the argument about language is also an argument about reason and what it can and cannot do. *Bildung*, for McDowell, is a process that involves both our innate potential as well as our upbringing. But Rorty's cause/justification distinction equates the idea of the non-linguistic with the idea of the Given. Since mythical givenness is empty without concepts, and since concepts are not possible without language, the attempt to speak about how things are is actually an attempt to gain non-linguistic knowledge of ourselves and the surrounding world. Rorty, of course, would acknowledge that, although "socialization goes all the way down," we are born with certain innate, biological potential, but he would probably add that nothing interesting can be said about this. Anything we do attempt to say about such potential will depend on the language-game into which we have been socialized—as with our justifications (which must be kept distinct from the space of nature), so too with our speaking. Whatever we are talking about, insofar as we attempt to talk about the innate potential with which we are born, is actually talk about what our fellows allow us to say (i.e., contingent talk made possible within one particular

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ideas and pervasiveness of his influence, it would be difficult to overemphasize Herder's importance in Western intellectual history. It has been said that Goethe (1749-1832) was transformed from a clever but conventional poet into the great artist we remember today by his encounter with Herder in 1770, and his continuing friendship with the philosopher. Herder developed fundamental ideas about the dependence of thought on language that are taken for granted today, and that inspired work by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) that are widely viewed as the foundation of modern linguistics. Herder developed the methodological foundations of hermeneutics, or the theory of interpretation, that Schleiermacher (1768-1834) later built upon, and that ultimately culminated in nineteenth-century German classical scholarship and modern Biblical scholarship. Herder's writings also led to the establishment of the modern discipline of anthropology and its methodology. Additionally, Herder profoundly influenced intellectuals as diverse as Hegel, J.S. Mill (1806-1873), Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Dilthey (1833-1911)." http://www.philosophy.uncc.edu/mleldrid/SAAP/USC/pbt1.html (accessed July 12, 2017).

sui generis language-game played by a local, linguistic community). Our words receive their meanings within the logical space of reasons, not from the space of nature.

Seen in light of Rorty's sharp nature/reason dichotomy, *Bildung* cannot ground conceptual capacities in non-linguistic structures such as McDowell's encounter with the world, since socialization is an exclusively linguistic process that transpires within the space of reasons and contains no justificatory relationship to our statements. Both the world and our innate potential fall on the "wrong" side of Rorty's sharp cause/justification distinction. This distinction tracks several other hard distinctions Rorty makes between (1) World/Language, (2) Nature/Reason, and (3) Nature/*Bildung*. As Rorty explains:

> Since "education" sounds a bit too flat, and *Bildung* a bit too foreign, I shall use "edification" to stand for this project of finding new, better, more interesting, more fruitful ways of speaking. The attempt to edify (ourselves or others) may consist in the hermeneutic activity of making connections between our own culture and some exotic culture or historical period, or between our own discipline and another discipline which seems to pursue incommensurable aims in an incommensurable vocabulary. But it may instead consist in the "poetic" activity of thinking up such new aims, new words, or new disciplines, followed by, so to speak, the inverse of hermeneutics: the attempt to reinterpret our familiar surroundings in the unfamiliar terms of our new inventions.[229]

But finding new words may sound a little too bookish for McDowell. Even though we have no concepts without language, what we "say" about ourselves and the world around must be constrained by more than the edifying descriptions we choose or the "poetic" activities in which we engage. The world also constrains. What we say and *do* forms our second nature just as the programming (a term Rorty uses for our linguistic training) does. It is not that Rorty does not realize that action is a part of our shared experience within a culture, the problem, according to

[229] *PMN*, 360.

McDowell, is that Rorty's metaphilosophical concerns create a blind spot for him. Rorty's zero-sum game sees the history of philosophy as an all or nothing attempt to obtain absolute certainty. Since we do not have it, we must accept that any attempt to constrain thought empirically, that is, any attempt to "credit thought with friction against independent reality," is an attempt to make us answerable to some sort of divine authority for Rorty.[230] This means that the place where we construct justifications, the logical space of reasons, has nothing to do with nature and vice-versa, save the causal impacts that one is almost forced to acknowledge. Since there is no real difference between truth and justification for Rorty, talk of an objective, mind-independent realm is synonymous with talk of non-linguistic things-in-themselves and essences.

3.6 Behaviorism and the "Deepest Level of the Self"

If we think of Rorty's "starting point" mentioned above—that cruelty is the worst we do—as presenting us with brute force impacts from the external world (Hume's impressions), then perhaps we can say that we are obligated to take-up some sort of stance to what we perceive. This, I take it, is the upshot of McDowell's argument—that the world has something to do, not just with causing beliefs, but also with the correctness of our judgments. But this is the sort of talk that leads to talk of non-linguistic forms of knowledge that Rorty wants to avoid. McDowell is not content to accept Rorty's version of humanism—a picture of human maturity that Rorty characterizes as involving an epistemological behaviorist approach to knowledge, one that makes us humans answerable only to other humans. Not only are we no longer answerable

[230] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 67.

to God—or to a fierce father figure—we are also no longer answerable to what Rorty calls the "deepest level of the self."

The inability to traverse the cause/justification divide means that "ideas" believed to represent both external objects and internal feelings (as an illustrative example we might think of the way that, in Descartes, the mind inspects its contents, making us "aware" of things believed to come from both the external world and from our bodily-based feelings), actually represent nothing until we they become a part of our language as we describe them. This is trivially true in the sense that a belief cannot be discussed by others until we communicate it linguistically. But to say that there is no such thing as nonpropositional knowledge (what Taylor, drawing on Heidegger, calls background knowledge or know-how), seems to be a conclusion that goes too far. But, for Rorty, there is no deepest level of the self and words are not correct in the sense of describing anything true "inside" a person and available at the level of conscious introspection. But this also means that human freedom is not connected to anything "deeper" in a person's being—that, as Rorty maintains, socialization "goes all the way down."[231]

As with earlier forms of behaviorism that deny the existence of human nature, Rorty's denial of any part of a self that escapes the socialization processes makes meaning, our ability to speak about things we regard as meaningful, appear mysterious. When McDowell says, "if we

[231] See René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writing of Descartes, Vol. II*, trans. John Cottingham, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 19. When Descartes says, "I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat," he treats his awareness of both external objects and internal feelings as ideas in his mind. Behaviorists have no problem with material objects, their argument is with the inner realm that supposedly functions as the ground for human freedom. This is also the realm that gets described as part of the material realm. In Rorty's epistemological behaviorism, both realms are "described" as fucntions of the language we speak. This has consequences, in my opinion, for more than just the Cartesian theory of ideas. It makes conscious awareness, concepts, and rationality, and freedom "linguistic" to the extent that "talk" about the inner realm is not talk about material things but rather about alternative ways of describing. Rorty's nature/reason dualism must insist that feelings are like atoms, rocks, and phlogiston—they are nothing until we describe them.

cannot see conceptual activity as part of a package that includes sensory consciousness of the objective, then the very idea of conceptual activity—which must have objective purport in order to be recognizable as conceptual activity at all—becomes mysterious," he draws our attention to the problem inherent in Rorty's attempt to redescribe both human biology as well as the ability of a person to make free, rational choices in the antirepresentationalist terms he prefers; Rorty's descriptions eschew any connection between mind and world. What we need, McDowell explains, is to show how "states of sensory consciousness can belong together, in the space of reasons, with the activity of deciding what to think about the world."[232] We interpret, but since nothing justifies our beliefs except other beliefs, what we say is grounded only in other words—we never get back to something non-linguistic that justifies. Talk about why we might draw the conclusions we draw tracks along these linguistic lines which depict, as metaphysical, any attempt to connect our descriptions to things (internal or external).

So we encounter the world as meaningful, but why this happens is part of an analysis that transpires within the realm of the logical space of reasons, one that remains distinct from the space of nature—human biology (the space of nature) is nothing until we describe it. McDowell thinks this conception of justification pays too high a price—it excludes the operations of spontaneity from entering into relations in the space of reasons. If we can see our way clear to saying that there is a non-metaphysical concept of second nature, as opposed to Rorty's understanding of the metaphysical concept of human nature (or the deepest level of the self as he characterizes it), we will see how exercises of spontaneity can be "rationally constrained by

[232] John McDowell, "Reply to Brandom," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. 58, no. 2 (June, 1998), 407.

facts, when the facts make themselves manifest in experience."[233] Understood this way, what we feel becomes a part of our descriptions, rationally, and not a brute force impact that is "impoverished" in the Hegelian sense until it is described or justified in our contingent language-game. But since conceptual activity is already implicated in our experience of the world, we do not privilege the Given, or commit the Naturalistic Fallacy by talking about the empirical content of our beliefs—an important corrective McDowell introduces, one that epistemology practiced in the Cartesian-British-empiricist style lacks—as if we have unmediated access to them.

I understand this to mean that, in McDowell's treatment of knowledge and unlike critique of knowledge we see in Rorty, spontaneity functions as an intermediary between nature and reason. We receive impacts from nature, but it is not the case that our statements just magically "pop" out of our mouths—that any attempt to illuminate this process is a metaphysician's attempt to locate the real self (the real wall behind the painted image) that is responsible for our utterances. Part of the problem, as I understand the issue coming out of Rorty's work, is his choice of metaphors. There are reasons to think, as I have tried to show, that Rorty holds a constructivist view of reality. But social construction also suggests, in my opinion, a kind of reductivism (or at least something that it is not constructed so as to stave-off the possibility of an infinite regress).[234] We are all, in the picture Rorty provides us, "painters," or "novelists," or

[233] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 143-44.

[234] At the very least, if one suggests that reality is constructed, then one can be asked to account for how one knows this. If what comes to be seen as real is a function of *x* (e.g., will to power or the ideas produced by the class that owns the means of procuction), the some form of reductionist thinking is in play. When Sextus Empiricus criticizes the academic skeptic's claim that reality is unknowable, he draws our attention to a similar problem. Whether we claim that reality can be reduced to *x*, or that reality is something that we cannot know, our claim will be incoherent unless we provide some criterion that allows us to distinguish between appearance and reality (but neither Rorty nor Sextus is interested in doing this—nor do they think it is possible). This is why the Pyrrhonean skeptic suspends judgment with respect to the "real" world, and it is why Rorty argues for the task of re-thinking or for philosophic

"story-tellers." But he quickly backs away from the ocular metaphor about painters of reality (an ocular form of thinking is a visual prejudice that he says we find in McDowell's empiricism but not in his pragmatism). Rather, Rorty prefers to focus on linguistic relations. Pictorial or representational relations take us too close to the traditional view of representation Rorty rejects. However, in slipping in terms such as "vocabularies," Rorty gives us an equally lop-sided emphasis on language. When these claims are understood along-side his "impossible dichotomies," to borrow a phrase from Bernstein, the either/or dichotomies that depict justification as either answerable to things in themselves, what we see in Rorty's thought is a reduction of "things" to words. Any attempt to argue against social construction is depicted as a representationalist view that is possible only if one possesses a language that is "Nature's Own."[235]

Rorty argues that, as he has explained above, "to have conceptual capacity just *is* being able to use a word." Whatever might be going on in a person, beneath the surface or under the skin, can be understood (and deflated) linguistically, that is, as talk about the real self (or the deepest level of the self thought to be responsible for what we say) that we can do without. But we cannot do without talk about the material, biological dimension of human life and human society (cannot do without it logically I would argue), so Rorty advocates for the idea that we can substitute a materialist description (or Darwinian one) for a Cartesian one, while insisting

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therapy and against reducing *x* to *y*, although I think his replacement of objectivity and answerability to the world with solidarity is a reduction to language and not simply a re-thinking of problems linguistically.

[235] *PMN*, 298-99.

that our favored description is nothing more than a "useful gimmick"—that no description actually "describes reality…better" than any other description.[236]

Since there are no conceptual capacities without language, we do not really need to see our way clear to vouchsafing an intermediary such as spontaneity to serve as a go between for the space of nature and the space of reason. Rorty understands this as the key difference between his and McDowell's respective approaches. In particular, to maintain as McDowell does, that what we need is an intermediary—something that can be described as being on both sides of the cause/justification divide—complicates the issues. Rorty understands his compatibilist approach, one that dissolves rather than solves problems, to be the more straightforward of the two. Rorty observes that for McDowell,

> things are not so simple. He says that "conceptual capacities…can be operative not only in judgements…but already in the transcriptions in nature that are constituted by the world's impacts on the receptive capacities of a suitable subject." McDowell agrees that rocks and trees do no talk, but they do not *just* cause us to make judgment either. He thinks of a perceptual appearance as a request to you by the world to make a judgment, but as not yet itself a judgment, even though it has the conceptual form of a judgment.[237]

McDowell does not accept, as Rorty does, that "to have conceptual capacity just *is* being able to use a word." These capacities are not related to the external world in just the causal manner Rorty describes. Such an analysis makes the "word" more important than it is. Conceptual capacities are connected to human biology and to the socialization process (*Bildung* and second nature). For McDowell, this connects us to the world in ways that Rorty's linguistic pragmatism fails to do. The upshot, especially when we turn to ethical judgments, is that it may be possible

[236] *TP*, 152.
[237] *TP*, 148.

to regard this stance, or world-directedness of statements, as rational in the sense that the world does impinge on our belief rationally and not merely in a causal way. A bad feeling with respect to material deprivation, for example, is not justified only within the space of reasons. It is, to be sure, described in this sphere, but the description is also connected to the relationship we take-up with respect to these impacts made by the world on our senses (this has roots not only in our linguistic socialization processes). Both spheres play a justificatory role for McDowell in ways that they do not for Rorty. Moreover, and this is what Rorty wants to avoid, McDowell's concerns (and his attempt to rehabilitate empiricism) threated to lead us back into foundationalist epistemology replete with the aporias that Rorty understands to surface whenever we begin talking about nonhuman or non-linguistic grounds for humanism. But McDowell sees these aporias not as a problem to be dissolved by changing the conversation, but as problems that require us to address them head-on. The theoretical assumptions that enable Rorty to advance his linguistic theory do not solve or dissolve problems, in McDowell's view, but rather they lead to a form of coherentisim (or linguistic idealism) that avoid the problems altogether.[238]

[238] See *TP*, 151. Rorty is aware of this conundrum. In an insightful and humorous quip he notes, "I, of course, think that McDowell has been seduced by an empiricist siren song and that my deafness to the song is an example of hard-won intellectual virtue rather than the result of a perverse act of will. But I also think that there is very little neutral ground for the two of us to stand on while we debate our disagreements…For I simply cannot believe that anything important hangs on saying, with McDowell, that we should lose our Kantian freedom unless perceptual appearances were distinct from judgments." I think Rorty, like Heidegger, wishes to move the current *Fragestellung* into a new framework in which these questions are no longer seen as pressing issues. But Rorty is also arguing, as I understand Heidegger not to argue, that we can consciously redescribe our opponents and, by making them look bad, "josh" them into adopting new descriptions. In the view I am recommending, "getting at" issues such as exploitation and material deprivation do seem to me to require a connection between mind and world. If we focus on descriptions and remove from consideration our subjective awareness of the empirical content of our beliefs, then it seems that we could produce any description we wish of the status quo since there is no rational account available to us concerning how things really are.

3.7 *Renversement des Alliances*: Empiricism and the Linguistic Turn

As I understand Rorty's claim, to deny that we have final vocabularies, as Rorty uses the term, is tantamount to arguing against the Linguistic Turn and for the idea of correct representation. What is worth noting here is that most of his critics never say that our words actually represent entities in the external world correctly. I do not understand people such as Habermas, Taylor, or McDowell to say that our words are correct in the sense that they succeed in throwing their hooks around something real in the external world. If I am correct then, to some degree, Rorty's antirepresentationalist argument against his more recent critics is based on a *non sequitur* (a scarecrow argument).[239] The either/or dichotomies Rorty employs, the ones Bernstein calls Rorty's "impossible dichotomies,"[240] represent the choices theorists face as ones that either adopt theories that affirm the tradition of metaphysics and continue the tradition of

[239] Rorty does not think we can distinguish between competing claims about justice in ways that allow us to identity one as "good" and the other as "ideological." His therapeutic approach aims at coping with rather than copying nature. But the line between the two is not always clear, especially if one agrees the word "red" is not copying nature when we speak about our internal idea of the color red. Theories of reason, such as Habermas's "critical reason," try to do the job Marx's labor theory did, but through a substitution of presuppositions of ideal communication for the less obvious talk of ideal conditions of labor in a just society. Still, we have aphorisms that seem to speak to phenomena on both sides of Rorty's dichotomy. The notion that, in spite of all the talk about rich and poor, when one actually goes to bed hungry one never forgets it, strikes me as more than a mere causal impact. If attitudes concerning the welfare state and the brutal effects of poverty are different among people who lived through the Great Depression, then the changes to consciousness that Marx understands to come from material changes in society may be more effective at changing a person's mind than the linguistic redescription for which Rorty advocates. When Habermas pursues his theory of communication he sets aside, temporarily, materialist concerns such as these. One reason is that he is concerned to avoid falling back into metaphysics and philosophy of consciousness. But, in my view, in spite of his efforts to keep his analysis within the perspective of an approach that focuses on a linguistically constituted lifeworld, he never advocates for a view of linguistic redescription or for the abandoning of our realist intuitions as Rorty does. In short, Habermas's perspective on ideal communication is only quasi-transcendental. While I think it is a perspective that clashes with Rorty's (Rorty has little use for ideas such as context-transcending validity) I find myself wishing that Habermas would say more about what I think are the problems inherent in the shift that Frege inaugurated from "mentalistic" analysis to "semantic" analysis. See Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 2.

[240] Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 241; See also Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 214. Commenting on Rorty's use of dichotomies during his career Bernstein writes, "And for all his skepticism about traditional philosophical dichotomies and distinctions, he introduced a whole battery of facile distinctions that tended to obscure more than they illuminated: systematic versus edifying; public versus private; argument versus redescription; finding versus making."

epistemology, or as decisions to do the opposite: to choose a theory that embraces the Linguistic Turn in philosophy and accepts that there are no constraints on our interpretations aside from those linguistic or conversational constraints that we create (or acknowledge as we engage in justificatory practices) and which, Rorty insists, transpire within the space of reasons, without impingement from the external world save the causal impacts which are lacking in justificatory import.

Seen in this way, a theorist who wishes to occupy a middle-ground and defend constraints that stand in a rational relationship—as opposed to merely causal ones—to states of affairs in the external world, i.e., a theory that strives to make sense of the empirical content of a person's belief (the deliverances of receptivity) that some theorists understand to be in play in the sense that they are already contained in concepts we use to justify statements are seen, in Rorty's treatment of the issue, as metaphysicians who refuse to accept that linguistic representations do not stand in rational relations to how things are. In stressing these "ironist" claims, Rorty is careful to distance himself from both the present-day liberal metaphysician and the positivist who thinks that the world rationally impinges on our beliefs. Rorty's insistence that the cause/justification divide is "bridgeable" only by metaphysicians who think that the world justifies, rather than merely causes, is not so much an answer to skeptical problems concerning knowledge as it is a case of shrugging one's shoulders at the skeptic and telling him to get lost.[241]

[241] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 143. I think it also opens Rorty up to the charge that Danial Conway makes concerning world-denial, although Rorty would probably argue that such criticisms lose their force when we abandon our old realist intuitions. See, Daniel Conway, "Taking Irony Seriously: Rorty's Postmetaphysical Liberalism," *American Literary History* vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991), 198; Daniel Conway, "Thus Spoke Rorty: The Perils of Narrative Self-Creation," *Philosophy and Literature* (Apr., 1991), 103.

What has happened since the 1950s, as Taylor notes, is nothing less than a dramatic *renversement des alliances*. But still, we might ask, is there a way to critique our present values that connects criticism to something rational, universal, and/or mind-independent? If so, is this an example of doing metaphysics in the way Rorty thinks we can avoid by embracing his idea of linguistic redescription? Rorty thinks reason makes only contingent claims. The argument against universalistic conceptions of reason is frequently prosecuted on the grounds that when we speak, our words do not represent "things" accurately. I agree, but I think Rorty is trying to do too much with this linguistic argument. Our statements, I argue in this dissertation, do need to throw their hooks around something. Rorty thinks of this as correspondence metaphysics, but, in borrowing insights from McDowell, Habermas, and McCarthy, I think we can see this, not as correspondence metaphysics but as a form of justification that does allow the world to impinge, rationally, on our beliefs. McDowell understands this through the lens of empiricism, while McCarthy (following Habermas) sees rational linguistic presuppositions embedded in communicative practices. In my view, both can been seen as critical perspectives of the excesses of a merely linguistic approach to knowledge, even though both remain committed to an approach that remains within the perspective of a linguistic, lifeworld-centered approach to knowledge.

CHAPTER 4

BECOMING COMFORTABLE WITH CONTINGENCY

Rorty acknowledges that correspondence remains an abiding theme throughout his work. He sees correspondence claims surface, in various ways, in empiricist thought as well as in philosophy of mind and in post-positivist philosophy of language. We can see the reasons why Rorty argues against empiricist claims concerning correspondence; words receive their meanings, not from what they represent, but from the ways in which the surrounding community uses them. The line positivism had drawn between appearance and reality, between science and pseudo-science, presupposed the possibility of a reduction of words (nouns and predicates) to things. Presently, with a view towards the epistemological skepticism Rorty's "therapeutic" approach to knowledge strives to move beyond, we see, I am arguing, a continuation of a quasi-reductionist tendency in the form of justification as coherence within the local human consensus.

But does this therapeutic side-stepping of answers to the skeptic mean that our critique of pseudo-science, as well as our criticism of the ideological views of truth that may be accepted in a society, cannot be justified? Certainly, if justification is only a relation of beliefs to other beliefs, we will not be able, in my view, to connect justification to how matters stand apart from what the current social consensus holds. These practices are analogous to Plato's shadows on the wall of the Cave. My worry is that side-stepping an issue may also mean that what should be regarded as ideology (or a statement that I would like to regard as not true), cannot be rationally criticized. Therapeutic approaches, in dissolving problems, seek to abjure talk of both reality and mere appearances. And, for Rorty, talk of appearance and Reality presupposes the view of knowledge, traditional epistemology and the resulting epistemological skepticism, he seeks to

move us beyond. But does the conception of justification as what passes muster with the local community mean that a noxious ideology, one that draws on a culture's racial and religious prejudices, for instance, can only be criticized as a "bad idea" and nothing more?[242] This is Rorty's position; and it seems to follow from his sharp distinction between nature and reason.

But perhaps Rorty's "blind spot" (referenced by McDowell in the previous chapter), prevents him from seeing that therapeutic approaches also contain theoretical commitments, in spite of their determination to avoid such commitments. When we look at the change from conceptual to propositional knowledge historically, Jürgen Habermas writes, we see that once "Frege replaced mentalistic *via regia* of analyzing sensation, representations, and judgments with a semantic analysis of linguistic expression and Wittgenstein radicalized the linguistic turn into a paradigm shift, Hume and Kant's epistemological questions [take] on a new, pragmatic significance."[243] The preference, inherent in the Western tradition for theory over practice, leaves us with an impoverished understanding of communication. In particular, after "the linguistic turn," Habermas explains, "the relation between proposition and fact replaces the relation between representation and object." This focus on assertoric utterances, as both Bernstein and Peirce observed earlier, produces an analysis that is already skewed, focusing as it does "too narrowly on semantics."[244]

Specifically, in Rorty's case, attention shifts to the metaphilosophical issues now conceived of in assertoric terms (what I have argued is Rorty's continuation of at least part of the logical positivist's approach). What is neglected in his analysis is experience (according to

[242] See *CIS*, 84. Rorty says that we can call ideology a bad idea, but that we cannot connect our criticism to normative structures outside the local language-game.
[243] Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 2.
[244] Ibid., 3.

Bernstein) and attention to communicative norms (as explained by Habermas). What I think needs to be added to the criticism we find in Bernstein and Habermas is the empiricism of McDowell. The significance of the world-directedness of propositions can act as a check on Rorty's deflationary, linguistic pragmatism. For Rorty, anything that removes the criterion for validity from the community of language-users and places it in "something" else, beyond our control, is a form of correspondence metaphysics—a conception of justification that falls into the Myth of the Given. Anything that is "correct" because the *world* says so is not correct because our fellow citizens who speak our language say so. But as Bernstein explains, even though as a fellow pragmatist he agrees with Rorty that we can give an adequate account of norms "by an appeal to social practices," he does not agree that this standard is merely conversational. In his retrospect on Rorty's career, Bernstein writes that there were times when Rorty "wrote as if anyone who even thought there was a proper philosophical way to speak about truth, objectivity, and 'getting things right' was 'guilty' of idolatry—bowing down before an external authority."[245]

But Rorty also thinks that there is a "something" his fellow theorists presuppose when they write about political values, knowledge, and the surrounding society. Even though they believe, as Rorty does, that language is the medium through which human beings understand, they are not willing to accept that the community of language-users is the standard in every case—that the constraints on us appear only in the form of conversational constraints as opposed to experience (Bernstein), a conceptually structured world (McDowell) or the assumption of universality (Habermas and McCarthy). They still think that "something" does impinge rationally on our beliefs. But Rorty understands these ideas as attempts to locate something

[245] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 213, 215.

"outside" the community that can serve as a ground for our principles. This "something" that keeps surfacing in the form of realist intuitions or necessary presuppositions about the world or language, Rorty maintains, is "printed" for us today by the current uses of our linguistic practices. The disagreement turns on the question, does the world impose rational or merely causal control on human inquiry? Rorty's compatiblism holds that the causal impacts we experience in our daily lives are sufficient "grounds" for our descriptions which, once we become content with mere descriptions—once we become comfortable with contingency as such—and rest content with the effort to dissolve rather than solve the problem of Mind and World.

4.1 Irony and Mitigated Skepticism

Moving beyond this inherited *Fragestellung* requires, as Rorty frames the question, acceptance that the surrounding community is the standard.[246] When we look at the ironist,

[246] Rorty would probably add that it is the source of meaningful metaphors, "standards" in the sense that cultural-situated individuals draw from this pool of metaphors as they create meaningful interpretations that can, in turn, influence our fellow citizens. Here we see the communicative dimension privileged over the representationalist dimension on which Rorty focuses so much. I do not object to this facet of Rorty's thought, but I think, having argued so forcefully against any attempt to do metaphysics, his use now of common, every day practices, as if such recommendations are unproblematic—since he is not advocating theoretical grounds as are the liberal metaphysicians—is an example of trying to eat one's cake and have it too. My objection is that the "foundationalists" whose work I find persuasive think such activities do require grounds. Rorty does not. This brings into sharp focus the question, is the linguistic community really the only ground possible or needed? The foundationalists from whom I am borrowing (and picking and choosing) are answering no to this question but in piecemeal fashion. I am attempting to make their answers more explicit while attempting to remain (if somewhat half-heatedly) within the confines of a linguistic, lifeworld-centered perspective. However, when Rorty accuses theorists such as McDowell of wanting to revive Bertrand Russell's "idea that nonreferring singular terms are only pseudo-singular terms," whereas, for "Davidson, Sellars, and Brandom…any singular term that has a use is as good a singular term as any other," I think we see an extreme and unacceptable form of relativism. I also think that this prevents us from distinguishing between things such as Darwinian evolution and creation science. Or, in the moral realm, I think it will allow for an equivalency between perspectives that we want to differentiate and call one just and the other unjust (or moral as opposed to selfish or self-interested). Rorty, of course, maintains that we do not need a theory to do what I am saying we need to do—to engage in discourse about such things. We just need to accept that we cannot call our critique rational. Moreover, the attempt to do so takes us outside the parameters of

Rorty writes, we see how such a move is possible. The ironist is willing to live with a degree of metaphysical insecurity that those sympathetic to foundationalism and the Enlightenment are not. We can understand the charge Rorty makes, that a theorist is "doing metaphysics," as the accusation that she is attempting to buttress her community (as an admittedly contingent standard) with a nonlinguistic or nonhuman standard—a normative standard that supersedes (or underpins) the historically contingent, linguistic practices of "our" group. As illustrative examples, consider Rorty's statements below:

> (1) Once we realize that progress, for the community as for the individual, is a matter of using new words as well as of arguing from premises phrased in old words, we realize that a critical vocabulary which revolves around notions like "rational," "criteria," "argument" and "foundation" and "absolute" is badly suited to describe the relation between the old and the new.[247]
>
> (2) We can keep the notion of "morality" just insofar as we can cease to think of morality as the voice of the divine part of ourselves and instead think of it as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language.[248]
>
> (3) To speak of human rights is to explain our actions by identifying ourselves with a community of like-minded persons—those who find it natural to act in a certain way.[249]

Now, to begin with, I have used the term "bookish" previously. But here we might observe the following: If Rorty is wrong about language then he is wrong about "progress for the community." There is, in my view, something odd about the notion that "progress" involves

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the linguistic turn. But, as I am arguing, if the move I think we should make does allow us to distinguish between truth and ideology, and if we can do so without clearly falling into the Myth of the Given, then I think that some version of what Rorty understands as a "word" that can be described as being on both sides of the cause/justification distinction is preferable to the idea that all singular terms are equal to all other singular terms. See, *TP*, 149.

[247] *CIS*, 48-49.

[248] Ibid., 50.

[249] *PSH*, 85.

changes in words and phrases. The extreme relativism, a charge frequently made against Rorty, stems, in my view, not only from his historicism; it stems from the use of terms such as speakers and vocabularies.

Secondly, and this is one of the central issues in question, it is possible that these linguistic changes are the *effects* of more fundamental causes. But arguments along these lines will take us back to the meaning of the word fundamental. Here, Rorty will simply require his interlocutor to give reasons for thinking that what we regard as "fundamental" or "important" really is as we say. And this is where Rorty will "cinch" the argument. Any term used by Rorty's interlocutor is already understood, by Rorty, as either a word that refers to a non-referential sensory impression or—if she is attempting to justify with words such as fundamental or good—a justification constructed from within the logical space of reasons that does not tell us anything "true" about the surrounding social world. The social world, the logical space of nature which contains no justificatory import for Rorty, has already shaped our lives and our views concerning what is morally good.

But what if speaking alone is not responsible for my views? If we think about non-referential impacts—sense certainty in Hegel—then awareness of the taste of something like hot fudge, by itself, is immediate but empty. But the objects of sensibility are richer and more diverse than this. Not everything received through the senses should be understood as a noninferential—an impoverished form of receptivity. Such an understanding of the logical space of nature is, for McDowell, the result of the naturalization of reason the stems from a "phobia of objectivity" that critics of the tradition (such as Rorty) take to lead to the abjuring of all talk of

answerability to anything other than to our peers.[250] But through the idea of second nature, the "world" already contains conceptual structure (thinkable contents) that we receive through receptivity. As McDowell explains it, although he does not put it in these terms, Hume's belief in the continued existence of the material world is a belief that the world imposes on us; it is received though sensibility, but its contents contain the notion of a world with structure, one that exists independently of the statements made from within the space of reasons. So, in order to make sense of the statements, "Williams suspects me of an unacceptable idealism," and "The earth orbits the sun," I must claim that something is the case (linguistically), and also that what I claim is actually the case.

Moreover, even if we think of sentences as "truth-bearers," it still makes sense, whether we report on what others assert (as we do in the first statement above) or about a state affairs in the solar system, we still have "claimings" that are interpreted, not just within the logical space of reasons, but also with an assumption of an independent "outside," a presupposition that is implicated when I assert that what I say is true. If I say I am not an idealist, then what I claim must actually be the case in the sense that I am claiming it and that I also claim that it is the case. Both are a part of what I say, as well as what my interpreter must also understand if she is to understand the statement correctly. Proximately, there is something that both I and my interlocutor interpret in the same way, and this interpretation pertains to the logical space of reasons and to the realm of law (space of nature). Rorty's nature/reason dualism does not permit this, and his frequent characterization of his interlocutor as a person using one set of words or another, shifts our focus off the world and onto sentences without actually arguing that it is

[250] John McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," 120.

correct to do so. This is Rorty's blind spot, as McDowell understands it, and it misses the fact that there is a rational structure present in the empirical content of our beliefs that the world imposes on us—not the other way around.[251]

If speaking alone is not responsible for my views, then speaking alone will not be sufficient to change my views. When we take an oath in a court of law and swear to tell the truth, the whole, and nothing but the truth, we are not thinking here of truth as tending to the consequences of what we say, given that the local human consensus is the sole ground for our statements. Rather, we think that a person, in the above situation, is supposed to report the facts correctly (or to the best of her ability), regardless of what the local community thinks. But this world-directedness, or the ways in which the world impinges rationally on the mind, is the empirical element of knowledge that Rorty wants to eliminate from our analysis of normative value judgments. Since the representational function of language is no longer present in our analysis (after the linguistic turn), language becomes a kind of vehicle for social change as if representation is the only thing language was capable of doing. But the employment of linguistic theory that we see in Rorty, and the accompanying recommendation concerning how to proceed in society free from metaphysics, is not the only path available to theorists after the linguistic turn. In tracing these developments after Frege, Habermas explains that linguistic philosophy in the pragmatic and Anglo-American traditions fails to understand the communicative function of language, emphasizing instead its representative function.

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[251] John McDowell, "Reply of John McDowell," in Mind and World: Essays on John McDowell's *Mind and World*, 199. Sextus Empiricus notes the even the skeptic will not say that he is feeling cold when he is actually hot. See Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, bk 1, no. 7, in Benson Mates, *The Skeptic Way: Sextus Empiricus's Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 90.

Tracking along these lines, we can see how the transformative power Rorty understands language to contain may actually stem from his over-emphasis on language and the problem of representation. Both the historicist and the pragmatic traditions, after Kant, understand the task of situating reason as one that involves coming to terms with the detranscendentalized subject. This is part of the shift from subject/object metaphysics to language. Kant's "pure" reason becomes "situated" reason and the analysis of propositions replaces the analysis of ideas.[252] But from here the two traditions diverge. Theorists who follow in the "wakes" of Heidegger and Nietzsche attack Kantian conceptions of reason at the roots, at the level of the rational subject. Theorists, such as Rorty, who follow in the pragmatist tradition from Peirce to Dewey, a tradition that follows in the wakes of Hegel and Marx, emphasize the importance of "sociohistorical molds" of "rational" thought.[253] In short, the two traditions present approaches to the subject that focus on the internal motives in the former and the external behavior in the latter. The first involves talk of motives, the second leads eventually to talk of grammatical rules and social practices.

The views of these traditions are, of course, not mutually exclusive. But when we look at the orientations and the presuppositions of each view, we see how each one reserves, for language, a different role in the picture of philosophy they paint. To say that reason is attacked at the roots—at the level of the subject—is to advance a theoretical critique of reason that necessarily speaks to what is "internal" to the subject. In Heidegger for example, as Habermas writes, we see that one of Kant's antinomies speaks to what is "inner" in a person: "the conception of a supposed world rests on the transcendental difference between the world and the

[252] See Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 84.
[253] Ibid., 83.

innerworldly, which reappears in Heidegger as the ontological difference between 'Being' and "beings."[254] Although Habermas is concerned to show that there are still necessary concepts such as universal validity that are presupposed in communicative action, he does point to a difference between the historicist and pragmatist traditions here with respect to necessary presuppositions. Neither the Habermasian formal-pragmatic communication perspective nor the historicist perspective rules out the power of language to elucidate the question between "world-disclosing language and innerworldly learning process." However, for the "heirs of Hume," and for analytical philosophy in general, this distinction "barely makes any sense at all."[255]

If I am correct, then, it is this attempt to re-think Kantian reason linguistically and to situate it within our cultural practices that is partially responsible for Rorty's belief that innerworldly talk is nonpropositional and metaphysical. Realist intuitions and presuppositions of universality both seem to reserve, for individual thinkers, special access to the contents of one's conscious mind.[256] But in the view I am offering, attention should be paid to what we do when we speak about (1) the external world, (2) the innerworldly realm of thoughts and feelings, and (3) the necessary or universal presuppositions built into language. Rorty thinks his use of the linguistic turn allows us to get at all three without making justification a matter of correspondence to the nonhuman. Moreover, he understands his criticism of innerworldly goings on to track along the lines he delineates in his critique of the mirror metaphor (the analysis of the creation of the Cartesian mind). However, as Habermas observes, this attempt to situate reason and detranscendentalize the subject, something that both the historicist and pragmatic traditions

[254] Ibid., 89.
[255] Ibid., 84.
[256] Bernstein quotes Robert Brandom as saying that Rorty talks about universal validity with "fear and loathing" and that he "hyperventilates" whenever anyone talks about "context-transcending truth claims." See Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 122.

do, brings with it suspicion concerning talk about the subject's relationship to the world (a suspicion that is keen in Rorty's linguistic pragmatism).[257]

4.2 Language and the Empirical Content of Beliefs

This is why McDowell worries about the empirical content of our beliefs in light of the threat from coherentism (linguistic idealism). It is also the concern that I have about Rorty's use of linguistic redescription as a means to proceed, once we accept that there is nothing of value "worth saving in empiricism."[258] Even though McDowell belongs to the pragmatist (as opposed to the historicist) tradition, and even though he is not concerned, as is Habermas, to spell-out the implications for communication that the assumption of universality has, he is raising the same questions with respect to language and "propositions." If our innerworldly goings on do not connect with something more than our conversational partners, then the content of our beliefs become "mysterious."[259] I see McDowell and the historicist tradition attempting to talk about the innerworldly goings on in ways that Rorty's pragmatism does not. Rorty's analytical presuppositions move his analysis more in the Wittgensteinian direction of an analysis of behavior and grammatical rules and away from the subject (and an analysis of internal moods and feelings). Rorty is interested in detranscendentalizating or deflating the problem, as are Heidegger, Derrida, and Nietzsche, but as Habermas points out, what we see here in the dispute between these two traditions is a domestic dispute over which side "accomplishes the

[257] Heidegger would wholly reject talk of "inner" and "outer." The ways in which we have come to see these terms grows out of the tradition of Western metaphysics that both Heidegger and Rorty wish to move beyond. What interests me is that Heidegger does not seem as averse to talking about moods and feelings as Rorty is.
[258] *TP*, 150.
[259] McDowell, "Reply to Brandom," 407.

detranscendentalization in the right way." As Habermas explains, the issue for historicists and pragmatists is

> whether the traces of a transcending reason vanish in the sand of historicism and contextualism or whether a reason embodied in historical contexts preserves the power for immanent transcendence. If cooperating subjects cope intelligently with what they encounter in the world, do their learning processes empower them to make rationally motivated revisions in their preunderstanding of the world as a whole? Is reason simply at the mercy of the "world-disclosive" happening of language, or is it also a "world-transforming" power?[260]

Discourse within philosophy of mind, as Rorty understands it, runs the risk of becoming metaphysical through the theoretical reflection on the contents of one's conscious mind. The nature/reason dichotomy is still operative in Rorty's analysis and, as such, it allows prima facie authority to introspective reports, but this does not provide infallibilty or an absolutely true relation between the human to the nonhuman. The distinction between causal relations and rational relations seems also to contain the idea, for Rorty, that rational relations require absolute certainty; whereas, the merely causal relations do not (the knowledge philosophers were after, historically, is thought to provide absolute certainty rather than a high degree of probability). However, I would argue, Rorty's understanding of certainty and the requirements of rationality begs the question in favor of the idea concerning the existence of an unbridgeable divide between causes and justifications (where justification is understood to require absolute certainty). What is more, with respect to regulative ideas, parties on both sides of the dispute seem to make use of them. The difference is that "metaphysical thinking," as Habermas explains, "falls victim to the dialectical illusion of hypostatized world order because it uses this regulatory idea

[260] Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, 84.

constitutively."[261] Avoiding introspection, in the way that Rorty seems to recommend, has constitutive import for his theory of linguistic redescription in the sense that language does not merely disclose a world, but rather it allows for conscious redescription and change (understood as changing our interpretations of intuitions without attempting to talk about realist intuitions concerning the existence of a mind-independent world—something Habermas would say ignores rational norms built into communicative action that the historicist tradition, in my view, would regard as a form of inauthenticity (and Nietzsche would understand through the lens of Slave Morality). Analyses that do this privilege the testimony of introspection and mistakenly affirm the Given. But for those sympathetic to Descartes and the Enlightenment, the "something" that is "privileged" is not simply a word that the community allows us to use. Yet Rorty's therapeutic re-thinking shows the testimony of introspection, here understood as an insignificant "qualia" or an impact due to human receptivity, as a representative realist prejudice. But Rorty's linguistic approach, as his critics have argued, create in human interpreters, beliefs whose empirical content remains mysterious due to the wedge that he has driven between causes and justifications.

Again, we see the contrast here between the two traditions. If we analyze qualia as "fancy"[262] or insignificant echoes in a cave as Thomas Hobbes did, then the innerworldly goings on become either mysterious or irrelevant. They are mysterious if we cannot account rationally for a connection between mind and world; they are irrelevant if we can disregard our realist intuitions and become comfortable with the idea that we do not need truth.[263] When I speak

[261] Ibid., 88.
[262] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Michel Oakeshott (London: Collier Books, 1962), 21.
[263] The latter idea presents us with two contrasting attitudes towards the "death of God." For Nietzsche this loss of certainty is significant, but for Rorty (even though Bernstein argues that it is significant) the death of God is

about pain, I am aware of something that is neither a word nor a thing. Knowing what pain feels like, or knowing what the color red is like, cannot be accounted for, completely, through a linguistic analysis alone. If I say my idea of red is understood by me and that when something is red it cannot, at the same time, be blue, a linguistic analysis alone will not be able to make sense of such a statement. One is required to reflect on the contents of one's conscious mind and recall what the color red seems like. The seeming quality is present in my mind when I reflect.[264] But if discourse about knowledge follows this path, Rorty argues that it takes us back into the tradition of metaphysics (back into the Given). Qualia, however, are not located in the community, they are thought to be inside persons (at the deepest level of the self). If reflection is directed at the internal thought object, rather than at a word that we use in a public language-game (i.e., a word whose meaning resides in the way a community of language-users has come

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represented as the loss of something that we never had in the first place. As such, figuring out how to make do without God is not really a problem, in the view Rorty recommends, since, once we accept that we human beings are the only ground for truth we need, we will no longer think that certainty is required.

[264] See Frank Jackson, "The Qualia Problem," in *Reason and Responsibility*, ed. by Joel Feinburg and Russ Shafer-Landau (Belmont, C.: Thompson Wadsworth, 2208), 297-301. Jackson no longer defends the dualist view he made famous in the "The Qualia Problem." Today he argues for physicalism and against intuitions in "Mind and Illusion" in *Minds and Persons* (2003). But he says of materialism (or physicalism): "Physicalism is a doctrine in metaphysics. This means that it should be possible to identify the issue, or any way an issue, between a priori and a posteriori physicalism which is an issue in metaphysics per se and not one about the analysis of psychological terms, or whether or not certain conditionals are a priori." But for the my purposes it will suffice to note that Rorty is not arguing for either dualism or physicalism, rather his intent is to show how metaphysical theory can be redescribed with an alternative vocabulary. But this, in my view, makes it possible to ask if either the old or new vocabulary ever presupposed the existence of something that fell on both sides of the cause/justification distinction. See Frank Jackson, "On Ensuring That Physicalism Is Not a Dual Attribute Theory in Sheep's Clothing," *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the AnalyticTradition* vol. 131, no. 1 (Oct., 2006), 229. "In "Postscript on Qualia" (1998) Frank Jackson announced that he rejects his famous knowledge argument against physicalism. In a new paper, "Mind and Illusion", he explains why. He appeals to representationalism-roughly, the view that phenomenal character consists wholly in representational character-to help explain where his knowledge argument goes awry. "I argue that representationalism provides no basis for rejecting the knowledge argument. Fans of the knowledge argument may grant ***arguendo*** that representational character exhausts phenomenal character; but the physicalist must still face a representationalist version of the Mary challenge, which inherits the difficulty of the original."
https://web.archive.org/web/20080516091824/http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/publications/proceedings/v76n3/public/abstracts.asp (accessed July 16, 2017).

to use it),then we risk falling back into the subject-object thinking that is characteristic of the Western tradition.

The main point I wish to make here is that Rorty's approach emphasizes propositions over introspection in such a way that it becomes possible to label the testimony of introspection as a form of metaphysical thinking. But, in my view, if we press this distinction between the external world, the innerwoldly goings on inside human beings, and his antirepresentationalist view of language, it is not clear what we do with qualia. More generally, the historicist tradition seems comfortable talking about moods and feelings in ways that Rorty's pragmatism does not.

There is, Rorty explains, a way out of the metaphysical tradition and it is rooted, if such a term can properly be used, in a linguistic conception of knowledge. If we can see our way clear to saying that the "world" no longer "decides" which descriptions are true," we can focus on ourselves (*qua* speakers of a language) as the ground for human knowledge.[265] Kant had given us a two-tiered approach that consigned science to "the realm of second-rate truth."[266] Rorty understands this as prejudice (a division of the world into noumena and phenomena) that allows the mind to inspect a realm of truth—the form or shape experience takes owing to the categories of the understanding—while the senses inspect the world of appearances. But the compromise struck by German Idealism was no more satisfactory than the transcendental ego. And, it was short lived. Neither Kant nor Hegel was willing to view the world, as Rorty thinks we should, as a contingent one that contains no truths "out there" independent of us. Kant and Hegel only went "halfway in their repudiation" of this idea. They were willing to see science, the bottom half of this divide, as a world that was made. "But they persisted in seeing mind, spirit, the depths of

[265] *CIS*, 5.
[266] Ibid., 4.

the human self, as having an intrinsic nature—one which could be known by a kind of nonempirical super science called philosophy."[267] Rorty contends that the move away from the tradition of metaphysics, the detranscendentalization of reason, can only be accomplished once we jettison these latent commitments to the idea that truth, independent of our linguistically mediated practices, is out there waiting to be found. Once we move beyond this idea, we can accept that we "make truth"—and that we have been doing this all along.[268]

4.3 Bewitched by Language

Rorty argues that the history of philosophy is punctuated by discourse that attempts to move beyond metaphysical theories. This move plays itself out in an attempt to solve the problems he associates with our desire to guarantee that our knowledge is reliable and that our most important beliefs are well-grounded. Time and time again, we see the revolt against

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[267] Ibid., 4.

[268] Rorty would add also that we need to remember that we have developed "practices" that have allowed us to distinguish between "true" and "false" assertions under various conditions including observational conditions. While I agree, I do not think that the notion of making truths follows. It is still possible that beliefs refer to something more than just to other beliefs. In using the diverse group of theorists that I have included in this dissertation, theorists such as Heidegger, Habermas, McDowell, and Taylor, I am hoping to illustrate the need to connect our descriptions to the empirical world rather than just to other descriptions—something that Rorty maintains is the only option we have. I also realize that not every philosopher from whom I am borrowing shares my concerns about empiricism and the possibility that we can still establish some sort of connection between mind and the world. Still it remains an open question as to whether the only constraints placed on us are the conversational restraints Rorty stresses (the ones he thinks can be changed through a conscious choice of descriptions). So, I am questioning the idea that there is an unbridgeable divide between causes and justifications. I am also questioning the idea that the linguistic turn shows us that words only refer to justifications within the logical space of reasons and that there is nothing else we can add to this neither in the form of a reason embedded in communicative discourse nor in an analysis of the ways in which the empirical world impinges on our conception of justification. Readers may also note that critics of the foundationalist tradition that I am defending (a tradition that I think can still provide a post-metaphysical ground for our moral beliefs and Rorty does not), do not all agree with Rorty's belief that our inherited humanist traditions are pretty good. Moreover, antifoundationalist critics (genealogists such as Nietzsche and Michel Foucault) do not think that the socialization processes (instilled into individuals through language and through force), can be redescribed through conscious choice of descriptions that have justificatory import. Although there is disagreement about the effects of power on human interpreters and what freedom, if any, they have to improve the conditions of daily experience, I have not made this issue, and the debate Rorty and Habermas have with Foucault, the primary focus of dissertation.

recalcitrant practices remedied by embracing some new method for grounding knowledge. But this process ends, Rorty maintains, with philosophers quarreling endlessly over the same issues. Each "rebel" proposes a new remedy and articulates a critique of what had been the accepted or recognized procedures by most of the intellectuals of the day. The latest "revolution," which we come to in our day, is linguistic philosophy. As a revolt, it shares features seen in earlier revolts. Rorty observes that the new theory

> typically consists in adapting a new method: for example, the method of "clear and distinct ideas" outlined in Descartes' *Regulae*, Kant's "transcendental method," Husserl's "bracketing," the early Wittgenstein's attempt to exhibit the meaninglessness of traditional philosophical theses by due attention to logical form, and the later Wittgenstein's attempt to exhibit the pointlessness of these theses by diagnosing the causes of their having been propounded. In all these revolts, the aim of the revolutionary is to replace opinion with knowledge, and to propose as the proper meaning of "philosophy" the accomplishment of some finite task by applying a certain set of methodological directions.[269]

In the contemporary period, linguistic philosophy proposes to dissolve old problems in an approach to knowledge that sees philosophical problems as the result of linguistic misconceptions. One problem with this method, Rorty admits, is that the "cause" relies on accepting an analogy that many nonlinguistic philosophers are reluctant to accept (the situation is further complicated because many of the reasons for adopting linguistic methods are also repudiated by other linguistic philosophers "who nevertheless persist in using these methods"). If words are analogous to tools, is not a good tool judged as such with respect to how it enables us to accomplish our goals in the external world? Rorty intends the analogy with tools to remove the middle-man that stands between Mind (or Language) and World. But there are reasons to think that something in this analogy has gone wrong.

[269] Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn*, 1.

Still, to say that we now have a good grasp on the reasons for a thesis having been propounded in the first place, seems like saying that we are now "correctly" diagnosing a thing in the world called a cause. As we move to a new paradigm, we find recalcitrant theorists who insist on using old methods to solve philosophical problems. They seem not to realize that linguistic philosophy has "dissolved certain traditional problems" that they continue to find compelling, and whose aporias they try to answer in a plausible manner.[270] But the answer, Rorty explains, is not to be found in a better or more rational theory that synthesizes warring factions; the answer is found in replacing old words with new ones. Needless to say, most people do not like being told that they have been "bewitched by language," to use Wittgenstein's phrase.[271] Such analysis, Rorty admits, seems to depict an interlocutor as unfit for serious philosophical discussion. Accepting the "cure" seems to require one to accept the very issue under discussion—that all traditional problems are actually linguistic.[272]

But as we move forward, with Sellars's attack on the Myth of the Given in mind, we see that to say, as Rorty does, that language goes all the way down, is to say that there is no deepest level of a human self. I understand this as a recommendation by Rorty of a new plan for coping once we rid ourselves of the metaphysical concerns extant in ideas such as human nature and the existence of essences (or souls). Once we understand the ways in which our descriptions have shaped our understanding of ourselves, we can replace these ideas and speak about appearances

[270] Ibid., 3.
[271] Quoted in Rorty, *TLT*, 3. See also Wittgenstein, 19e. Here we see Wittgenstein's famous pronouncement that "philosophical problems arise when language *goes on holiday*."
[272] One might wish to take a more sympathetic reading of Rorty and say that, in the view he recommends, the answer is not *always* found in a better theory and that traditionally philosophical problems should be *conceptually* focused on the linguistic. But in my view and in light of his criticism of theory and of philosophy in general, I think my interpretation of Rorty's view of language and theory is sound. He does not, in my view, think that the theoretical activities of philosophers are telling us anything that a good novelist could not tell us. Once we abandon our desire for essences and universals, there really is not much left, as Rorty explains in his treatment of literature in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, for philosophers to do.

without needing to think that there is something more fundamental to be known (i.e., that there is something more fundamental about a person that lies beneath or outside language). At the theoretical level, this is what I understand to be at stake in the debate about Cartesian minds and Rorty's image of philosophy as a Mirror of Nature. Here we see Rorty re-thinking Cartesian and substance metaphysics linguistically, with an eye towards avoiding talk about human nature. Rorty also warns against viewing this new linguistic understanding of philosophy as the "successor subject" to epistemology.

But as Williams noted earlier, we should not think of Rorty's criticism of epistemological skepticism as a criticism of skepticism with respect to epistemology. Rorty may "redescribe" Cartesian minds without taking a position, but he does not seem merely to redescribe moral and political knowledge without taking a position. His ironist politics contain reductionist arguments in addition to the therapeutic ones contained in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Nonphysical substances may not exist, but the language we used to describe our material/political lives seems to be world-directed in ways that we cannot dispense with. A linguistic change does not seem to remove what may be more than a mere causal connection between our beliefs and the space of nature. But as Rorty explains:

> This turn toward language was thought of as a progressive, naturalizing move. It seemed so because it seemed easier to give a causal account of the evolutionary emergence of language-using organisms than of the metaphysical emergence of consciousness out of nonconsciousness. But in itself this substitution is ineffective. For if we stick to the picture of language as a medium, something standing between the self and the nonhuman reality with which the self seeks to be in touch, we have made no progress. We are still using a subject-object picture, and we are still stuck with issues about skepticism, idealism, and realism. For we are still able to ask questions about language of the same sort we asked about consciousness.[273]

[273] *CIS*, 10-11.

Rorty's cautionary stipulations can be read as a criticism of the prejudices of analytical philosophy. If analytical philosophers ask the same questions about language that epistemologists had asked about the subject-object relationship, then the "progressive" turn toward language might become a step backward. But what I understand critics of Rorty to say is that his linguistic pragmatism makes some of the same mistakes that he argues metaphysicians make (in both the analytical and continental traditions) as they attempt to locate grounds for justification in the nonhuman. His collapsing of the scheme/content distinction is accomplished by treating language (hermeneutics) as the successor subject to epistemology (even though this is something that Rorty maintains he does not wish to do). Moreover, without relying heavily on an antirepresentationalist picture of language, one that focuses on the relationship between word and meaning rather than the connection between word and world, it is hard to see how the scheme/content dichotomy could be collapsed at all.[274]

So, while Rorty does seem to want to dispense with the idea of language as a middle-man between humans and the world—and focus just on how we talk about things—he realizes that embracing this turn toward language risks reproducing subject-object thinking in a new "linguistic" form. He even acknowledges that the "linguistic turn may, for all we know now, lead us back to rationalism and to idealism."[275] Still, the naturalization of reason contains, in the case of Quine discussed earlier, a type of "bald naturalism" that has reductionist characteristics.

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[274] Rorty would say that this begs the question against him. But I think that we should ask questions not just about signifiers and signifieds, but rather we should ask if the referent is rationally implicated in our justificatory schemes. It may not be implicated as Rorty maintains and that is an important issue. But the danger of producing circular arguments is pressing for both camps (antirepresentationalists and those sympathetic to a minimalist empiricism). Rorty's argument is that truth is what our fellows allow us to say. When we communicate, the referent need not be present; however, by itself, this is not an argument for severing all connections between mind and world.

[275] *TLT*, 9.

And even though Rorty thinks Quine mistakenly reserves a special place for the language of physics, he agrees with Quine's "semantic ascent" and says, with Quine, that we can avoid the problems associated with metaphysics if we make the "shift from talk of objects to talk of words."[276] These are the sorts of recommendations that seems to boarder on reductionist. They also bring to the mind the "blind spot," as John McDowell puts it, contained in Rorty's thought, that, although permitting a re-thinking of recalcitrant metaphysical problems, seems reductionist once we place language and justification firmly within the logical space of reasons. That it is correct to do so seems, in McDowell's view, to go unquestioned by Rorty.

But all of these ideas have become issues for us, according to Rorty, owing to the legacy of correspondence metaphysics. In order to avoid the presuppositions of subject-object metaphysics, we need to think of the consequences of holding a view, rather than thinking of the view as descriptive of an underlying reality. This, for Rorty, is true whether we are dealing with statements about the external world or introspective reports about our own feeling. But seen in light of McDowell's idea of second nature and Searle's arguments for introspection and external realism, Rorty's view seems to reduce the belief in external reality to the realist intuitions humans have that can (and Rorty thinks should) be replaced by different intuitions. If there is a material substratum underlying the lifeworld, as Habermas argues,[277] or if the material world already contains a rational, conceptual structure that we receive through receptivity (as we see in McDowell), then sticking to language or worrying about convincing our peers and letting "truth

[276] Ibid., 11.
[277] Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 231

and the world… take care of themselves," as Rorty argues we should, is, in the view I am recommending, a kind of linguistic reductionism.[278]

4.4 Rorty's Therapy: "Borrowing" from Metaphysicians?

This is a thorny issue that tracks along the lines that Sextus Empricus has already spelled-out. As such, we might think of Rorty's ironism as a rough equivalent of ancient skeptical ideas (e.g., *pathē*, *epochē*, and metaphysical noncommitment).[279] But as I have already mentioned, Rorty does not wish to apply these in the manner that we see in Cartesian epistemological skepticism, rather he utilizes these with respect to questions raised concerning his notion of justification as social consensus. This is what Michael Williams calls skepticism with respect to epistemology. As we have seen, Rorty does speak, at times, as if the belief in external realism is one that we inherit from our tradition. Understood this way, Rorty's compatibilism is roughly analogous to *pathē* and *epochē*. Here we talk about how things seem to us (*pathē*) without feeling a need to answer the metaphysician (*epochē*) who, with the theories she creates, attempts to solve rather than dissolve philosophical problems.

But when Rorty talks about language he sounds as if he has seized upon the correct way to understand matters. He does not merely suspend judgment and talk about how things seem, he regards language as the thing that creates appearances and the "real world" as if this distiction is a false belief that we should never have believed in the first place. Consider the following as illustrative. Rorty states:

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[278] Rorty, "Response to John McDowell," in *Rorty and His Critics,* 127.
[279] See Mates, *The Skeptic Way*, "What Pyrrhonism is Not," 6-9.

> [F]rom the point of view I have been commending, any attempt to drive one's opponent up against a wall in this way fails when the wall against which he is driven comes to be seen as one more vocabulary, one more way of describing things. The wall then turns out to be a painted backdrop, one more work of man, one more bit of cultural stage-setting. A poeticized culture would be one which would not insist we find the real wall behind the painted ones, the real touchstones of truth as opposed to touchstones which are merely cultural artifacts….But, once again and for the last time, that claim about philosophy itself is just one more terminological suggestion made on behalf of the same cause, the cause of providing contemporary liberal culture with a vocabulary which is all its own, cleansing it of the residues of a vocabulary which was suited to the needs of former days. I can perhaps make this abjuration of philosophical neutrality in the interest of political liberalism more palatable by referring yet again to the Wittgensteinian analogy between vocabularies and tools.[280]

We might ask: Is the real wall there, but given our limitations, does it remain something about which we can never speak? I think Rorty would reject this view on the grounds that it presupposes Kantian *noumena* or Cartesian skepticism concerning the *mundus absconditus* (the vanishing world). Still, we are speaking about *something*. Rorty implies that what we take to be real is a function of our inherited tradition—realist intuitions that can be discarded or replaced with new intuitions. He also reminds us that ours is a linguistically mediated tradition (and on this note, practically every theorist after the linguistic turn concurs). But it seems to me that to speak of inherited traditions and to speak of linguistic mediation is to speak of two realms of being that may or may not be entirely linguistic in the sense that Rorty gives it with his idea of final vocabularies.

After all, we humans (replete with material and biological limitations) are the ones who are engaged in conscious introspection. If something like spontaneity (McDowell) or universality (Habermas) is operative in speaking, then there is something in the tradition that is not a function of language (or something that beings such as us have done in various historical

[280] *CIS*., 53-55.

epochs even though our horizons have changed dramatically). But Rorty does not wish to talk about patterns or universals or even of authentically held beliefs. When Rorty talks about vocabularies, he speaks as a field linguist, objectively describing the vocalizations made by speakers in a given environment. This activity transpires, as it were, within the space of nature, the place where we find only causal relations. But the "natives" who speak the language are not merely describing. The have normative beliefs that the field linguist does not share. They take up relationships to the entities and practices about which they speak. These beliefs they have matter to the native speakers who hold them, and it is because of this that native speakers attach normative import to what they are doing in ways that the field linguist does not.

We might think of speaking, in the second sense, the normative sense, as an activity that takes places within the space of reasons. But these two realms are not connected in Rorty's views. There is no "middle-man" or God's eye point of view that allows us to make a judgment about how these beliefs relate to the space of nature. But, and this is not a trivial matter, the native speaker thinks that her beliefs do relate to something outside the space of reasons. Normative judgments contain justificatory import that, in Rorty's analysis, never throw their hooks around anything "outside" in the causal realm (space of nature). This last feature of communication does not seem to fit nicely into the nature/reason dualism, and it points to unavoidable assumptions and patterns that seem to exist when we humans attempt to live our lives together. Rorty would probably regard these as insignificant patterns that emerge anytime human beings get together to do things. But what I hear his critics saying is that these patterns are evidence that nature impinges rationally on the ways in which we organize our societies and treat (or fail to treat) our fellows. Even if we have to be engaged in discourse first in order for

these necessary or unavoidable features of language, rationality, and receptivity to become implicated in discourse, the possibility that the same presuppositions are made repeatedly, suggests that socialization does not go all the way down as Rorty maintains—that the nature/reason dualism leaves something important out of our analysis.

As I have tried to show, statements that are intended to apply to external things and those thought to be descriptive of internal reports on "qualia" do not seem to lend themselves easily to the sorts of deflationary, linguistic analyses for which Rorty advocates. If we look at his more pragmatic approach to the consequences of thinking that a belief "represents" as opposed to agreeing to talk only about how a belief is used, we see reasons for treating the consequences of linguistic behavior that are reminiscent of the pragmatic view concerning the desirability of bringing theory and practice closer together:

> This line of thought about language is analogous to the Ryle-Dennett view that when we use a mentalistic terminology we are simply using an efficient vocabulary—the vocabulary characteristic of what Dennett calls the "intentional stance"—to predict what an organism is likely to do or say under various sets of circumstances. Davidson is a nonreductive behaviorist about language in the same way that Ryle was a nonreductive behaviorist about mind. Neither has any desire to give equivalents in Behaviorese for talk about beliefs or about reference. But both are saying: Think of the term "mind" or "language" not as the name of a medium between self and reality but simply as a flag which signals the desirability of using a certain vocabulary when trying to cope with certain kinds of organisms. To say that a given organism—or, for that matter, a given machine—has a mind is just to say that, for some purposes, it will pay to think of it as having beliefs and desires. To say that it is a language user is just to say that pairing off the marks and noises it makes with those we make will prove a useful tactic in predicting and controlling its future behavior.[281]

My objection is not that we cannot re-think or re-imagine "minds" in the ways that Rorty suggests. I agree that, at times, language can "kick up a cloud a dust" and cause us to think of

[281] Ibid., 15.

our own social conventions as part of a natural or divine order. But I see this as an argument that is convincing because it does involve more than just talk within the *sui generis* space of reasons. To a degree, if we can see our way clear to saying, as McDowell does, that our statements are correct with respect to more than just the conversational restraints (and conventions) Rorty references, we can see the "blind spot" or the reductionist dimension of Rorty's thought.

One objection, implicit in the present analysis, is that Rorty seems to want to have it both ways: He wants to dissolve rather than solve these issues while, at the same, weighing in on a debate that, historically speaking, has not made the antirepresentationalist presuppositions that his linguistic theory makes about the relationship between mind and world—Mind (or Language) and World. A person who does not think, for instance, that socialization goes all the way down, will not be willing to think of intentionality as explainable by either physicalism or a nonreductive behaviorism. Rorty's "therapeutic" approach to knowledge claims looks more like an antifoundationalist linguistic attack on what McDowell calls freedom (spontaneity).[282]

If Rorty is not reducing both the mental and the physical to the linguistic, but rather suggesting a way to regard these as linguistic, then it may still be possible to think of minds or selves as already containing concepts that are implicated in our dealings with the world as both McDowell and Habermas suggest in their own ways. But thinking in these terms, as I understand Rorty's argument against correspondence, is a mistake. There are, as Rorty has

[282] When analyzing statements about a mental versus a behavioral disposition, we can think of the statement, "John wants a Caribbean holiday" as a statement about John's behavioral dispositions without reference to his mental states. If given a choice between Barbados and Bali, John will choose Barbados. But if he has concerns that a terrorist hijacking, for instance, is likely, he may pick Bali. Predictions about his behavior seem dependent on the goings on in his mind. I do not see language as an alternative way of thinking about materialism, dualism, and behaviorism: I see it as an attempt to reduce metaphysical issues to linguistic ones (to *solve* problems once language is no longer on holiday). For more on Philosophical Behaviorism see Paul Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1984), 23-25.

noted, good reasons to avoid making claims about competing frameworks and the possibility that one conceptual scheme is better than the other. But the linguistic worldview is a framework as well, and Rorty is careful not to make statements that might cause him to be accused of producing arguments that contain performative contradictions. I take this to be one reason for his insistence that his linguistic pragmatism "dissolves" rather than "solves" philosophical problems. But in the criticism I offer of Rorty's "merely" linguistic strategy, it cannot be allowed (in order for Rorty's view to be coherent) that we have a choice—made from within equivalent paradigms—to think about God, souls, reality, or universals instead of language. For Rorty, the concept of truth, as opposed to what we take to be forms of (linguistic) justification, disappears when we accept a view of language as dissolving problems once thought to be compelling. Since words no longer represent reality, the idea of truth is not of much use either. This seems to me to come closer to reduction than to re-thinking in linguistic terms. And, in light of McDowell's complaints about coherentism, I think Rorty's "re-thinking" moves closer to what could be viewed as linguistic idealism.[283]

4.5 Justification, Language, and Absolute Certainty

When we make a decision to perform an action, we do so, in most cases (or perhaps in every case), without the guarantee that our action will succeed in accomplishing its intended goal. To be sure, some of the doubts raised in these circumstances are specious—what Peirce

[283] But this assumes that Pontius Pilot's question, "What is truth?" can and should be answered. Those sympathetic to realism will want to do so. They will feel the threat of coherentism; whereas, phenomenologists and pragmatists such as Rorty (who want to tell the skeptic to get lost) will not feel the need to produce such an answer.

and Karl-Otto Apel call "paper" doubts.[284] But "statements" that are supposed to count as knowledge are frequently held to a much higher standard. Here we can see critics of representational realism agreeing that knowledge should provide us with absolute certainty. In a sense, they accept (temporarily) a "Cartesian" standard for "knowing" in order to show that such standards are impossible. Knowledge, they say, is supposed to be a statement about "reality," and in order to count as knowledge, it must be justified in a way that connects truth and justification in a relationship not merely of probability, but in one that yields absolute certainty. Those sympathetic to a minimalist realism, such as Apel, think that antirepresentationalists take the goal of metaphysics far too seriously only to show that such certainty can never actually be achieved. And, of course, in our daily lives, absolute certainty such as this is never required.[285]

In other words, "knowledge" must provide us with either correct representation or universal consent (in order to count as knowledge) or we have no such thing as rational, prejudice-free knowledge; since it does not meet this "requirement," some antirepresentationalist maintain, there can be no knowledge of the sort that realists desire. These debates, in my view, become zero-sum games in which the realist is required to defend a standard for knowing that

[284] Karl-Otto Apel and Benjamin Gregg, "Can an Ultimate Foundation of Knowledge Be Non-Metaphysical,?" *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* vol. 7, no. 3 (1993), 176.

[285] Wittgenstein makes a similar point about absolute certainty: "Suppose that, instead of saying "Bring me the broom", you said "Bring me the broomstick and the brush which is fitted on to it."!—Isn't the answer: "Do you want the broom? Why do you put it so oddly?"—Is he going to understand the further analysed sentence better?—This sentence, one might say, achieves the same as the ordinary one, but in a more roundabout way." See, Wittgenstein, 29e. Antirepresentationalists will see this as a desire, on the part of metaphysicians, to locate a "real thing" that makes our sentences true. And certainly within analytical philosophy, we see realist and reductionist theories of truth applied to an analysis of sentences. But I think the same criterion, a belief that absolute certainty is required in order to have knowledge, is presupposed by antirepresentationalists as well. A realist argument concerning necessity or universality may be contradicted, by an antirepresentationalist, on the grounds that we cannot say for certain that every interpreter, now or in the future, will see universal validity as a normative requirement. There may be some people who do not think that a just statement is one that could be accepted by any imaginable universal audience. In other words, in distinguishing between knowledge and opinion, the antirepresentationalist seems to reject the knowledge claim for the same reason that the representationalist thinks she has it: it connects the subject's statement to a normative structure, not in a highly probable manner, but in an unalterable way that gives us absolute certainty.

never actually obtains. It is in this spirit that McCarthy defends the "idealizing assumptions" contained in Habermas's account of communicative reason. McCarthy is concerned to defend Western rationalism from the sorts of attacks contained in the Rortyean and Derridian views mentioned above. He does not do so in the ways that McDowell does, but he is concerned to show that the cause/justification distinction does not close off the possibility of defending our views, as rational, in the sense that the truth of statements depend on shared, rational structures presupposed by all speakers and not simply the linguistic conventions that a speaker has had instilled into her by the dominate forces in a society (the media steering mechanisms of money and power) and which she accepts uncritically. McCarthy accepts that interpretation, within a lifeworld-centered approach to knowledge, does not enable us to obtain knowledge of real entities in the ways that foundationalist epistemology had hoped.

> In the end, there is no way of determining which is the "the better argument" apart from how competing arguments fare over time, that is, how they stand up to the ongoing give-and-take of argumentative discourse. The redemption of truth claims, the establishment of their warranted assertability or rational acceptabililty, is thus an intrinsically temporal, open-ended process. Because "for us" all the evidence is never in and all the conditions are never ideal, it is a potentially misleading hypostatization to speak, as Habermas sometimes does, of "rationally motivate consensus" in anything but processual terms—all the more so once we have abandoned traditional notions of demonstrative certainty and realized that in most areas we have to make do with a "principle of insufficient reason."[286]

Still, as McCarthy explains with respect to formal ideals, once we have before us an understanding that, under ideal conditions that need not actually pertain, a good conversation contains assumptions made by all participants that, he thinks, demonstrate the existence of these unavoidable presuppositions that figure, rationally, into the process of coming to agreement. As such, it becomes possible to evaluate moral claims, for example, by imagining whether or not a

[286] Thomas McCarthy and David Hoy, *Critical Theory*, 76.

claim could be accepted by a universal audience. But the problem, David Hoy explains, siding with Rorty's idea of solidarity over and against the McCarthyian/Habermasian idea of universal validity, is that there is no way (not even logically or conceptually) of ever obtaining the sorts of conditions required for unconditionality or universality:

> I find myself unconvinced by this account for many of the same reasons that I gave earlier against Habermas's account. For one thing, I think that it would be irrational for one to aim at an ideal if one knew that in principle it could never be attained. Just as no one could really aim to discover the last value of π because there is no last number, so no one could really be trying to complete the endless task of convincing a universal audience.[287]

Again, we see the same argument based-on the same either/or: either we have absolute certainty or we must make do with only our inherited social practices. It is not possible to account for an endless number of possible interpretations that might exist in an imagined universal audience, so the supposedly "universal" requirement contained in our understanding of what makes for a valid truth claim (and the argument supporting such notions concerning the persuasiveness of rational, context-transcending validity), is dismissed on the grounds that it fails to account for all possible audiences.

In his review of *Critical Theory*, Rorty offers the following observation:

> Since I am a die-hard pragmatist, I cannot even pretend to offer impartial adjudication of the Hoy-McCarthy debate. So I shall confine myself to two remarks. The first is that this is a very useful book to assign when teaching courses in contemporary European philosophy or in sociopolitical philosophy. My students like it a lot. I found that assigning just a little Foucault and a little Habermas plus the Hoy-McCarthy book led to a better understanding of the issues than assigning lots of Foucault and lots of Habermas. The second remark is that if one prescinds from Foucault's antihumanism, as Hoy does when he amalgamates Foucault with the deeply humanist Gadamer, then the remaining differences between Foucault and Habermas seem to make very little difference. One reaction my students had to the Hoy-McCarthy book was to ask whether the

[287] Ibid., 255.

> presence or absence of adjectives like 'unconditional', 'necessary', and 'universal' before the noun 'truth' was an issue worth debating. [288]

Rorty consistently champions humanist values and he does so here. He is also a consist critic of the attempt to ground the convictions that lead to such values and he is, again, consistent here in that regard as well. What is striking, though, is the statement that placing words like universal or necessary before the noun truth, is represented, by Rorty, as an issue that is hardly worth debating. Rorty has spent much of his career debating just such issues and, more specifically, challenging realists with his wit as well as with his deep insights into the underlying issues contained in both analytical and continental philosophy concerning truth and justification. Moreover, those who think that the values we prefer do have grounds, and that these can be shown to be rational (or at the very least that they are not just about a bunch of adjectives placed before a noun like "truth"), will think that Rorty begs the question in favor of an antirepresentationalist view of language that already contains the idea that languages receive their meanings from the local human consensus alone. That we require nothing more than the willingness to assert our preferences for our values, is one of the issues that foundationalists think is debatable (theories of language and meaning aside).

It may be that Rorty had grown weary of the accusations and counter-accusations concerning who is (or is not) doing metaphysics. As Wittgenstein famously observed, "in the end when one is doing philosophy one gets to the point where one would like just to emit an inarticulate sound."[289] But the analogy Frank Verges attempts to elucidate above is useful (if only for heuristic purposes). In addition to the similarities with radical empiricism, Verges

[288] Richard Rorty, *Ethics*, vol. 106, no. 3 (Apr. 1996), 659.
[289] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 93e.

thinks the debate above mirrors the earlier skeptical debates within classical empiricism. He notes the similarity between the skepticism brought to the fore by the linguistic worldview and that of skeptics from earlier periods:

> The parallels between deconstructionist and foundationalist presuppositions extend further. The sceptical arguments passed down from Sextus Empiricus, via Montaigne and Descartes, and subsequently reinscribed within empiricist epistemology, singled out for special attention instances of non-veridical perception such as sensory illusions and hallucinations. A connected premise was that any account of perceptual experience must itself be neutral as between its veracious and non-veracious possibilities. So empiricists postulated private, momentary, mind-dependent sense impressions (ideas, sensa, sense data) to bridge an alleged ontological gap between the knowing subject and the object known. But such logically private entities were notoriously ill-suited to account for the more humdrum cases of veridical perception which in any case were presupposed from the outset. G. E. Moore, for example, perplexed by the relationship between sense-data and their corresponding physical objects, flirted with the self-defeating conjecture that sense-data were 'diaphanous'. Deconstructors, on the other hand, though captivated by a linguistic version of virtually the same picture, will insist that signifiers are not so much translucent as they are opaque.[290]

Although he does not refer here to the Myth of the Given, Verges's point can be understood in light of it. His analogy suggests that the cause/justification distinction itself rests on a kind of Given. While it is true that, as we see in the analyses of givenness, sensory impacts, as it were, have been mistakenly taken as warrants for beliefs. From Kant to Rorty we see arguments that are instructive on this point; sensory impacts, by themselves, are not reasons. But the persuasiveness of the argument (and the accompanying sharp nature/reason distinction) is an argument about a picture of what philosophy does in the world. As Verges sees it, the linguistic worldview remains trapped in within the logical space of reasons, as it were, thus recommending, as a persuasive argument form, the acceptance of reasons that come to the fore in

[290] Frank Verges, "The Unbearable Lightness of Deconstruction," 388-89.

a theory about knowledge that presupposes the truth of the nature/reason distinction which is itself a theory put forth within the space of reasons.

To unpack the above further, Verges draws our attention to the role language plays in this "new" theory of knowledge. Sensory impacts cannot be reasons by themselves, but they become intelligible through the applications of concepts (the array of concepts elucidated by McDowell and borrowed, by him, from Kant's transcendental ego (the twelve categories of the understanding that McDowell analyzes under the term spontaneity). Whatever one says about the interface between concepts and intuitions (word and world), it is not clear that one can simply focus on the former and dismiss the latter as if it (along with the world) are both the result of human convention (although language is clearly the product of human convention). But focusing on the mind (or language) is also a conceptual game. As Verges explains, in an argument that amplifies McDowell's while utilizing different terms, the

> most conspicuous failure of deconstruction is its forfeiture of the sound, materialistic point that speech and writing are as much a part of the natural world, mediated by social and linguistic conventions, as any other human activity. That deconstructors seem oblivious to this truism lends credence to Habermas's diagnosis that, in spite of protestations to the contrary, their ruling assumptions remain trapped within the 'philosophy of consciousness', or the 'philosophy of the subject. In the rival, naturalistic account of language which runs through the later Wittgenstein, Austin, Davidson, and Habermas, language-games are woven into the warp and woof of social practices. No room is left to interpose the representational conundrum of how words manage to throw out hooks so as to link up with things. But for deconstruction, faithful in spite of itself to what it calls the 'logocentric' tradition, language or writing continues to be thought of as an omnipresent screen through which one sees only darkly. The result is to keep the metaphysical pendulum swinging back and forth between various alternatives whose prospects of overcoming logocentrism are announced from the start to be doomed to failure.[291]

[291] Ibid., 389-90.

Whereas McDowell argues that concepts are already "implicated in the deliverances of sensibility,"[292] Verges maintains that materialism is, in an analogous way, already implicated in reflection within the space of reasons (sound waves and neuron firings). Acceptance of reasons as persuasive, while maintaining that only beliefs can justify acceptance of beliefs, is actually an argument that represents beliefs as having a kind of brute force persuasiveness in the same way that sensory impacts, understood as Humean impressions, were thought to have on the human mind.

We can understand this as the argument that the Myth of the Given is based on a kind of second-order Given. Philosophers who recoil from the idea of givenness have already accepted previous assumptions about what we are doing within the reflective dimension analyzed as the logical space of reasons. Verges suggests that what makes the cause/justification distinction plausible, and leads one to separate mind and world, is a prejudice that treats words as having the same (mistakenly supposed) impacts as sensory impression. But these linguistic impacts are not passively received any more than were the sensory impacts privileged by empiricists. And it is this view of language which leads to the conclusions concerning coherentism, that is, to a kind of nominalism with respect to words, that McDowell also finds unacceptable. Verges's point is that what we see is a view of language that goes further than Deweyean naturalism, Quinean holism, and Sellarsian anti-reductionism. We see a view of knowledge that actually becomes reductionist—in spite of its ostensible trajectory that should abjure reductionist theories—as it analyses "pre-linguistic" raw feels and "linguistic behavior." In placing everything that is

[292] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 46.

important to human beings within the space of reasons, we see a theory of knowledge that, in Verges's view, reduces all awareness to linguistic "place-holders."[293]

Verges's critique is about postmodernism and language in general. Although applicable to Rorty, the arguments Verges makes about language are pertinent, in Rorty's case, only on the periphery. Verges is not playing the analytical philosophy game that Rorty is playing. This is probably wise because, as I mentioned earlier, to do so with Rorty is a fool's errand. Rorty's knowledge of this tradition is substantial. However, there does seem to be, in what Rorty and other antirepresentationalists in the analytical tradition say about language, an argument concerning the limits of human knowledge—one that depends on, what I think strikes theorists such as Verges, questionable assumptions about just how important language is. It is these concerns that lead to the charges concerning Linguistic Idealism.

In the end, Verges does not accept the "therapy" Rorty's approach offers. Like Winston in Orwell's *1984*, Verges sees linguistic redescription as threatening to take away our ability to speak about Reality. But it begs the question against Rorty to assume that a therapeutic approach is inadequate because it eschews talk about the "real" world. If it was a mistake to think along the lines that Rorty criticizes in the first place, then such an objection misses the point. On the other hand, it begs the question in favor of therapy if one attributes the reluctance of a person unwilling to submit to therapy to his "need" for Truth. Such attributions presuppose a need that the "patient," who allegedly requires therapy, will insist she does not have. If our realist intuitions are not evidence of our inability to cope with a world in which our peers, rather the world, justify our beliefs, then the therapy is not required. Insisting that it is needed begs the

[293] Frank Verges, "Rorty and the New Hermeneutics," 313.

question in the same the way that the inquisitor at a witch trial does when he takes the accused person's denial that Satan exists as proof that the person has the devil inside.

With these ideas concerning what may or may not be inside, at the deepest level of the self, I would like to turn, in the chapter below, to Rorty's analysis of introspection and the "creation" of the Cartesian mind.

CHAPTER 5

MENTAL STATES AND PHYSICAL BRAIN STATES:

A LINGUISTIC VIEW OF MINDS

As we saw in the previous chapter, Rorty's target is still the correspondence theory of truth. Here, since we are admittedly biological/material beings, the question concerns these "ideas" in our minds and what if, anything, we can say about their relationship to the surrounding world and the physical body. Rorty's therapeutic approach to the Cartesian mind, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (*PMN*), shows how a thinking "thing" can be redescribed as a physical object. But the characteristics of conscious awareness, conceptual capacities, intentionality, and the ability to speak about states of affairs believed to be "outside" the mind, are no longer attributed to the workings of a nonphysical mind substance.

At times, Rorty talks about the mind as if it can be reduced to the physical brain. But at other times, he speaks about the self through the utilization of the same antirepresentationalist arguments, and either/or dichotomies that dot his thinking in other areas. These arguments suggest that Rorty's redescription of the mind carries with it a kind of reduction of intentionality and aboutness—concepts that philosophers such as John Seale do not treat as mental "things" nor as behaviors or descriptions—to the same "practices" that he urges us to see as the conversational grounds for our moral and scientific knowledge claims. I argue that Rorty's attempt to perform "philosophical therapy" and excise foundationalist "language" from our understanding of minds is actually a form of linguistic reductionism.

In this chapter, I discuss Rorty's treatment of Descartes against the backdrop of the dualist/materialist debate within philosophy of mind. Then, I compare Rorty's critique of

introspection to the analysis of realism in the work of Charles Taylor and John Searle. Both understand Rorty to offer a nonrealist position that borders on social constructivism. I suggest that a possible "pragmatist" reading of Rorty's antirealism helps to explain his harsh criticism of the correspondence theory of truth, but as Bernstein and McDowell have argued, the metaphilosophical issues Rorty presses (i.e., his determination to root out all forms of correspondence) prevent him from connecting judgments to the space of nature in a way that figures rationally in his treatment of the self.[294] And it is on this score, in the view of Taylor, Searle, and McDowell, that we see a problem with Rorty's linguistic pragmatism: It is a form of non-realism that prevents him from arguing, rationally, for the humanist values he says he wants to defend. I trace this "non-realism" to his use of language.

Many theorists have made the linguistic turn, and many of these (e.g., McDowell and Habermas) have also been critical of ideas such as essences and the notion of final ends. But Rorty is criticized for his "relativism" more harshly than are other pragmatists. Bernstein, for example, who argues for fallibilism while maintaining, at the same time that he is not a skeptic, basically accepts all of Rorty's arguments against foundationalism. The difference between their two approaches, Bernstein writes, is that he is not as concerned with metaphilosophical issues of justification as is Rorty. Since Bernstein never "suffered from the 'God that failed' syndrome" as did Rorty, the value of talking about experience, without worrying about foundations, never seemed as problematic to him as it did to Rorty.[295] Still, in the end, Bernstein is not offering any "grounds" for humanism that Rorty would reject as metaphysical, although his criticism of

[294] The latter proposal is McDowell's. Bernstein suggests that what we need is to talk about experience and continue the conversation about how we live together and treat one another. His suggestion is simply that Rorty is more concerned with metaphilosophical issues than he (Bernstein) has been during his career.
[295] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 214.

Rorty's advocacy for "conversational grounds" is germane to the complaint critics of Rorty make concerning his relativism.

Taylor and Searle, in my view, are right to insist on some form of realism when talking about the testimony of introspection, and, while Rorty is not opposed to introspective language *in toto*, his linguistic view leads to the conclusion that the realist intuitions supposedly found in introspection do not really tell us anything important. But if we think about realist intuitions together with McDowell's idea of world-directedness, I think we do have more than just a trivial truth about causal, as opposed to justificatory, relations between mind and world. I argue that Rorty's treatment of Cartesian minds in *PMN* contains the same linguistic arguments he employs to rid us of our realist intuitions and the idea of world-directedness in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (*CIS*). These arguments, while effective therapy for a society (philosophers as well as some nonphilosophers) obsessed with essence talk, fail to fill the void his linguistic pragmatism threatens to leave when he applies the same argument to the individual and society.[296]

5.1 Consciousness and Intentionality

Much has been said about not only the importance of private, subjective reflection, but also of its limitations as well. René Descartes takes, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, the awareness a human being has, when engaged in conscious thinking, to be the ground for our concept of personhood. The ability to do things for reasons, actions that I am both conscious of and responsible for, is one of the most important cornerstones of the Cartesian concept of

[296] Roy Bhaskar echoes this theme in his criticism of Rorty. Bhaskar notes: "The crucial questions in philosophy are not whether to be a realist or an antirealist, but *what sort* of realist to be (an empirical, conceptual, transcendental, or whatever, realist); whether one explicitly theorizes or merely implicitly secretes one's realism and whether and how one decides, arrives at or absorbs one's realism." Roy Bhskar, "Rorty, Realism and the Idea of Freedom," in *Reading Rorty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 205.

agency.[297] Here the idea of introspection becomes paramount since, as a material creature, I am not responsible for all of my feelings.[298] The reflective dimension of personhood seems to make it possible for our choices to have intentionality (a Cartesian mind) behind them.

It would be a mistake, Bernstein explains, to see a significant difference between the early and late Rorty with respect to correspondence. *The Linguistic Turn* had established his credentials as an analytical philosopher, and in 1978, Rorty was elected vice-president (president-elect) of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association at the relatively early age of 47.[299] The Eastern Division was, at the time, a bastion of analytical thought, so when *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* appeared a year later, analytical philosophers felt as if they had been betrayed by one of their own. In the book, Rorty utilizes the work of both analytical and continental theorists in an argument that was widely perceived as an attack on the Kantian foundations of analytical philosophy.

If we see Rorty's work against this backdrop, then we can see both *PMN* as well as *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) as attempts to articulate the same themes. Understood this way, his "literary" arguments in *CIS* are actually suggestions about how to proceed once we understand the foundations of analytical thought to have been successively undermined. But as I

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[297] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 12. McDowell argues that concepts are located within the logical space of reasons but they are connected (through *Bildung* or second nature) to the logical space of nature. The interplay between nature and reason prevents our judgments about truth from being social constructs while avoiding the naturalistic fallacy by suggesting that impressions by themselves contain justifications independent of our concepts. Failing to make this distinction is what McDowell calls "rampant platonism." McDowell's understanding of spontaneity has normative import and it is implicated in the idea of human freedom: "the understanding is a faculty of spontaneity—that conceptual capacities are capacities whose exercise is in the domain of responsible freedom."

[298] Readers should note the similarity here between this idea in Descartes and Immanuel Kant's treatment of the material/empirical world and the intelligible order. The latter realm, for Kant, enables human beings to become rational moral agents. The noumenal world for Kant is real; whereas, the phenomenal world is appearance (made possible by the transcendental ego). Rorty will attempt to resolve this tension by making our linguistic descriptions of ourselves and the world around us not merely appearance, but the only world to which human beings have access.

[299] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 203.

note above, the ideas of a nonphysical soul, intentionality, and rational communicative structures embedded in discursive practices and functioning as universal norms, should not be regarded as equally "metaphysical" (even though as Rorty would point out, these are attempt to make us humans answerable to things other than each other). So, proceeding linguistically—whether one makes a "looks-claim" or an "is-claim"—is beside the point. The issue is what, if anything, do we lose when we proceed linguistically in the way Rorty recommends? On this, Rorty is clear: we lose nothing. Accepting that the world stands only in causal and not justificatory relations to us, will do just fine as we proceed free of the metaphysical grounds we thought we needed. Rorty's side-stepping of epistemological skepticism now becomes an argument against epistemology that he applies to the felt need liberal theorists have (and liberal ironists shun) for grounds for our moral and political principles.

Taken in bits, of course, we can see Rorty arguing for "looks-claims" rather than "is-claims."[300] Like the Pyrrhonean skeptic, we can see Rorty "borrowing" from foundationalists (dogmatists) while attempting to make no claims about how things are. But he also argues that language is conventional (we "speak" but the "world" does not). And, most importantly, we see in his work the shift, that has already taken place, from conceptual to propositional knowledge. Here we see a truth represented: There are no concepts without language. Although a theorist can hold this position without accepting a form of idealism, the view certainly smacks of idealism. Rorty (and even McDowell) have felt the need to clarify their positions and to insist that they are not linguistic idealists. Rorty says the "world" is out there, but the "truth" is not. But here he does not mean that we have knowledge of an external "reality" in itself. He means

[300] *TP*, 151.

only that causal states and mental states are two different things; so, the world causes but does not justify—we do the justificatory work with the sentences we construct.[301] This may sound like idealism unless we read the nature/reason duality as a statement about what else is "out there" as well (but Rorty does not say this to my knowledge). McDowell is more emphatic. He states, "Of course it would be absurd (not just odd) to say that the world is made up of true utterances."[302]

But McDowell does not accept the sharp nature/reason dualism as does Rorty. For Rorty, concepts are conventional; they are human constructs that are made within the space of reasons and, as it were, not discovered "out there" in the realm of nature. This is part of his linguistic pragmatism that prevents the world from making sentences true. In saying that the world causes, we limit ourselves to "observable" reports on what human beings do. But this is not a form of empiricism for Rorty. These observation reports only tell us that people tend to say "x" and "y" after they are exposed to "p" and "q." But, such utterances are historically and culturally contingent. Rorty's treatment of linguistic utterances avoids talk of rationality and intentionality in the same way that behaviorism avoids talk of the inner Cartesian soul thought to be responsible for the "dignity" that we humans are sometimes capable of exhibiting.

Rorty also attributes the reluctance of representational realists to accept this picture of philosophy to an attempt, by them, to locate something outside language (a concept that is not made)—a desire for grounds that harkens back to a desire for God (a source for metaphysical security we should eliminate along with our realist intuitions). In saying this, Rorty adopts, not

[301] *CIS*, 5.
[302] McDowell, "Reply of John McDowell," 199.

an insider's perspective, but one that is decidedly an "outsider's perspective."[303] In other words, Rorty defends his linguistic pragmatism by utilizing both perspectives while, at the same time, presenting arguments that are hyper-consciously linguistic in that he (unlike his critics) is not attempting to connect his descriptions to how things are.

We have seen how McDowell and Habermas attempt to reconstruct the logical space of reasons to show how Rorty's conception of justification overlooks important reasons we have for holding (or justifying) beliefs. Both are concerned to avoid the Myth of the Given, an imperative that surfaces in Habermas under the heading "philosophy of consciousness."[304] Whether we conceive of normative justification in the conceptual structure already contained in received intuitions or as discursively redeemable intersubjectively, we are still reflecting on the contents of our conscious minds. But such reflection can avoid falling back into the Given, provided we make the appropriate distinctions between an introspective program that contains unwarranted metaphysical assumptions and those that do not. Frequently these debates boil down to whether a person intends for her sentence to represent something in the external world or merely to report (and suspend judgment about whether it actually corresponds). Or, in the case of Rorty, one might simply insist that one is side-stepping representation *in toto*.

It is in this context that I find Searle's arguments in *Mind, Language, and Society* to be useful. Searle, in my treatment of him, picks the stick up by the other end, so to speak and examines the phenomenon of conscious introspection to see if there is anything we can say about

[303] See Charles Guignon and David Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality," 339-361.
[304] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume Two: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*. trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 1. Even though Habermas thinks that our realist intuitions are important, he does not think that personal introspection can serve as a norm for justification. He says, "As I have argued in Volume 1, the paradoxes to which this conceptual strategy leads show that rationalization cannot be dealt with adequately within the conceptual frame of the philosophy of consciousness."

representative realism based on an analysis of consciousness. Rorty examines introspection as well, but he does so with the intent of performing philosophical therapy rather than constructing philosophical answers to questions concerning grounds for knowledge claims. I argue that Rorty's redescription of Cartesian minds actually contains a normative dimension seen in his concept of ironism, which I have argued, grows out of his "Mirror" metaphor as he applies linguistic redescription to moral and political knowledge. Below, I discuss Rorty's treatment of introspection in Descartes followed by an analysis of Searle's treatment of consciousness and intentionality.

5.2 Re-thinking and Reduction

Rorty creates a thought-experiment designed to show that the realist's conviction, i.e., that words represent something real either in the world or existing at the deepest level of the self, is actually a conviction that stems from the misuse of language. Rorty imagines creatures on a distant planet called Antipodeans. The Antipodeans are very much like us; they work and play just like we do. When they are injured, they react as we do: cradling injured limbs, etc. The difference is that the Antipodeans, unlike us (Terrans), never developed the language of inner-feels talk (the "raw feels" our Cartesians and dualists call qualia). Instead, they report on their neurological states. When injured, they will say, "my C-fibers are stimulated" instead of saying "I feel pain." In such a culture, the seventeenth-century "'idea'idea" never would have developed. "Ouch!" does not exist as an exclamation. Instead we can see the Antipodeans saying, "C-fibers." Or, if an injury is severe, they might shout "C-FIBERS!" This verbal exclamation may be followed by a behavioral disposition such as writhing around—a behavior

we may interpret correctly, but this is only a coincidental interpretation due to our similar neurological structures. It does not mean that there is something called a feeling of pain and another thing called stimulated C-fibers (e.g., as there is in Cartesian dualism). In light of this, some of the Terran philosophers begin to wonder whether or not the Antipodeans have raw feels at all. Since we can be mistaken about how things seem to us, we can be wrong about our feelings. These incorrect reports suggest to Descartes a distinction between the physical body/brain and the conscious awareness that does the introspecting.

In the Second Meditation Descartes makes an observation that illustrates this issue: "For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking."[305] When listening to the Antipodeans talk about their C-fibers, we may wonder if they might be mistaken as we are. If an Antipodean had a phantom pain, would he not (incorrectly) report having C-fiber stimulation?

Now, to begin with, we can certainly say that the pain refers to stimulated C-fibers. But this is a referential theory of meaning in which the word "pain" actually refers to a physical brain state. Rorty is, of course, aware of this. But he tells us many times that the language of science does not carve nature at her joints:

> Attention (of the sort fostered by intellectual historians like Thomas Kuhn and Quentin Skinner) to the vocabularies in which sentences are formulated, rather than to individual sentences, makes us realize, for example, that the fact the Newton's vocabulary lets us predict the world more easily than Aristotle's does not mean that the world speaks Newtonian.

[305] In René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writing of Descartes, Vol. II*, trans. John Cottingham, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1984), 19.

> The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak. Only other human beings can do that.[306]

Rorty suggests that Descartes' mind can be replaced by C-fiber talk. But, as the passage above suggests, no language-game is correct relative to another. So, there really is no reduction of mental states to brain states. And this, I think, is a conclusion that is both congenial to Rorty's nataure/reason dualism and serves as a means by which to avoid epistemological skepticism. This is so because brain states are ultimately reduced to language-games which do not get their meanings from what they actually represent. Here we see that something "redescribed" as both a mental awareness and as a physical thing cannot logically have a foothold in both camps. The sharp distinction between what comes from the senses and what we do as we think and reflect leads to the conclusion that we are not justified in believing in mental states or physical brain states. So, while we have beliefs due to received impressions, according to Rorty, we do not have justification for saying that reflection gives us Truth. The conceptual scheme that enables us to make sense of the empirical content of our beliefs is itself the product of a contingent language-game.[307]

Now, Rorty would put this differently. He would say that *talk* of brain states is being *re-imagined* as talk within a language-game and that neither of these forms of talk requires correct

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[306] *CIS*, 6.

[307] See Jennifer Hornsby "Descartes, Rorty and the Mind-Body Fiction," in *Reading Rorty* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990), 45. Hornsby argues that the whole idea of a mental state misses the importance, for Descartes, of the mind as a substance. She argues that when Descartes talks about conscious awareness he might be talking about substance dualism, but he is not talking about property dualism. The possibility of reducing a metal property to a physical brain state is not what Descartes is talking about when he talks about conscious awareness. If we read Hornsby's analysis against the backdrop of Searle (below), we can see that conscious awareness is more than awareness of what pain feels like. Intentionality and aboutness are features of having a conscious mind. We can speak and act on reasons that we have and we do these things (things such as uttering assertoric propositions) with a belief that there is an external world outside our minds. Hornsby and Searle suggest that this feature of conscious introspection yields a conviction that cannot be redescribed. See also, Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings and Address of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1973-1974), 5-20.

representation. But this is the central issue being raised, i.e., is social consensus an adequate norm for determining the truth of our statements? Rorty depicts any attempt to make us answerable to the world (or the deepest level of the self) as a desire for metaphysical comfort. Human maturity, the growth he envisages as an outcome of therapy, requires us to give up the need for security and to realize that we are only answerable to other speakers.

If we challenge Rorty's norm of social consensus, then we are implicitly challenging his version of therapeutic philosophy and along with it the idea of re-imagining linguistically rather than reducing to language. We can talk about physical brain states or we can talk about inner feels, but to say that neither of these needs to have anything to do with the external world, and that we need only focus on how the community permits us to use our term, seems to me to be a "Rortyan" linguistic theory with normative important. Specifically, and this might be the point for Rorty, it is not a neutral treatment of the nature/reason divide, rather it seems to raise the question in such a way that any attempt to breach the divide is depicted as an attempt to justify an external authority over our thinking.

In focusing on "talk," I maintain that Rorty has already prejudiced inquiry in favor of the view of "reality" he is recommending. Those who are sympathetic to a minimalist empiricism, as McDowell is, will not want to say that we are re-imagining talk of brain states as talk of "x." It is, of course, true that linguistic philosophy has shown us that we are not speaking about a "thing" when we speak about the color white, and that, in fact, our whole notion of representation is mistaken in cases such as these due to our failure to understand how language works. However, giving up on seventeenth-century correspondence theories of truth does not mean that inquiry itself should not be directed at the external world—that we are not answerable

to the world but rather only to ourselves. The fear that theorists such as McDowell and Searle have is that the "unbridgeable" cause/justification distinction leads us to focus on a conception of justification that misses the ways in which the external world already impinges, rationally, on our justificatory practices.

Rorty's attempt to dislodge people from the vocabulary of objectivity, McDowell argues, "tends to have an effect that is exactly opposite to the one he wants. The way to cure ourselves of unwarranted expectations for philosophy is not to drop the vocabulary of objectivity, but to work at understanding the sources of the deformations to which [it]…has historically been prone."[308] The result is that Rorty insists on a theoretical understanding of inquiry that makes the content of empirical beliefs look mysterious. Secondly, McDowell observes, his treatment of inquiry is needlessly abstract and unpragmatic as well. Moreover, if Rorty's talk actually presupposes something physical in order to overcome our metaphysical thinking (and re-imagine our talk), then he is not staying within the bounds of the cause/justification distinction either.

5.3 Descartes' *Cogito* and World-directedness

Rorty argues in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that Descartes' concept of mind is an invention that stems from a poorly argued "hunch."[309] But what Rorty thinks specifically gets invented is not clear. Is it a nonphysical substance, a mental property, or is it conscious awareness itself? Clearly he wants to avoid talk about the incorrigible testimony of introspection, but at times he seems to suggest that any talk about "raw feels" presupposes awareness of an essence that is exempt from the effects of socialization. Here we see Rorty, as a

[308] McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity," 121.
[309] *PMN*, 58.

critic of correspondence theories of truth, trying to avoid talk about the "ghostly" inner episodes that Cartesian metaphysics seems to privilege. But if we try to avoid all talk about this inner realm (Mirror of Nature talk), then what do we say philosophers are actually talking about when they talk about the testimony of introspection? Here we might ask if therapeutic philosophy also makes statements about the relationship between introspection and how things are.[310]

Have representational realists such as Searle been deceived in thinking that the content of empirical beliefs must be connected to something other than contingent vocabularies? If so, then un-packing the deception seems to involve replacing an incorrect belief with another better one. But if the goal is to chart a course, as McDowell writes, between the Scylla of the Myth of the Given and the Charybdis of coherentism, then showing that we are not talking about how things are, takes us back in the direction of coherentism and the fears about the *mundus absconditus*.

Searle's objection to Rorty's antirealism references the same issue Bhaskar gets at with his idea of existential intransitivity (things exist independently of descriptions). Rorty agrees that they do, but only in a trivial sense. Any attempt to shore-up the connection between mind and world in a way other than causally, falls back into the Given and the idea that the world, rather than other humans, justifies. Some form of referential realism, Searle argues, is necessary to make sense of consciousness and intentionality. Even if we abjure the correctness talk found

[310] Rorty has good reasons to stress the limitations of introspection. The correspondence theory of representation in which perception is thought to create, in the mind of the perceiver, an internal idea, is a theory of knowledge that has a long history. It is not natural, as Thomas Reid pointed out to David Hume, to speak of (1) my idea of a table on the one hand, and (2) the table in the external world on the other. This is actually a theory of knowledge that presupposes the existence of two things: one internal and the other external. But once we agree that knowledge should not be thought of as correct representation between idea and external object, we still have this conviction that something is going on in my mind when I think and reflect. See Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 169. Taylor argues that Rorty, following Davidson, offers a critique of epistemology that is still representationalist. Rorty's attempt to just walk away from representation leaves the scheme-content distinction collapsed and, as a result, remains trapped within a "mediational" picture of language and the world that presupposes the validity of the "Inside/Outside" account of mind and world.

in correspondence theories of truth, it still seems "natural" for us humans to think that we are speaking about something. "Aboutness" does not, of course, guarantee the truth of external realism, but as Searle understands it, some talk about an independent, external world is necessary even if we label such talk metaphysical:

> Thinkers who wish to deny the correspondence theory of truth or the referential theory of thought and language typically find it embarrassing to have to concede external realism. Often they would rather not talk about it at all, or they have some more or less subtle reason for rejecting it. In fact, very few thinkers come right out and say that there is no such thing as a real world existing absolutely, objectively, and totally independently of us. Some do. Some come right out and say that the so-called real world is a "social construct." But such direct denials of external realism are rare. The more typical move of the antirealists is to…[defend] social constructivism, pragmatism, deconstructionism, relativism, postmodernism, and so forth.[311]

Searle thinks that Rorty's pragmatism does just this. At times, Rorty seems to draw on insights from the behaviorist camp. At other times, he flirts with materialism (which is obviously not concerned with literary self-creation as is the liberal ironist). Materialists reduce the testimony of introspection (qualia) to the goings on inside the physical brain. But, at still other times, Rorty suggests that the inner Cartesian mental realm can be completely eliminated through linguistic changes.[312] If the Cartesian mind was invented, then it follows that a proper understanding of

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[311] Searle, 15.

[312] We can think of *gestalt* switches or of paradigm shifts as described by Thomas Kuhn. Here we might say that alternate "perceptions" might be equally "true" or "valid." I think such a discussion is one that Searle is interested in having; however, if one were to say, as I think Rorty does at times, that he is simply showing how to redescribe and that he is not taking a position himself, then I think Searle would regard such a statement as either a performative contradiction or as incoherent. We should also note that, in spite of his criticism of skepticism, Rorty's arguments, as I have noted in several places above, are actually reminiscent of Sextus's notion of borrowing from dogmatists while not actually taking a position himself. But here we see not alternate theories that privilege reason or sensation for example, here we see a theory, in Rorty's case, that takes language itself as part of the analysis that judges theoretical claims about truth, language, and external realism. Can we say that we are borrowing from dogmatists as we speak a language and analyze theoretical claims about mind, world, and also language? Clearly we can, but unless we provide some grounds for what we say about language—grounds that permit us to criticize the linguistic behavior of others without having our criticism turned back on us—, then I think the analysis runs the risk of becoming circular. It is one thing to speak a language (when language is not the subject of the inquiry) and claim

what Descartes was talking about yields the conclusion that the mind will not simply be reduced to physical brain states or behavioral dispositions—it will be eliminated once we change our descriptions of it.

This is Searle's point about the ways in which abstract philosophical theories challenge the "default" or common sense position most people accept. The choice, as Rorty presents it, is between answerability to an "order beyond time," or the acceptance of consensus as the only standard of justification to which we are answerable. But the way off this Ferris wheel is not through an embrace of the normativity of social consensus (a conception of validity that theorists such as Searle and McCarthy fear will lead to a parochial linguistic idealist theory of truth). As Searle explains:

> This is typical of philosophical problems that seem insoluble. We are presented with two inconsistent alternatives neither of which it seems possible to abandon. But, we are told, we must choose one. The history of the subject then becomes a battle between the two sides. In the case of consciousness and the mind-body problem, we were told that we had to choose between dualism, which insists on the irreducibility of the mental, and materialism, which insists that consciousness must be reducible, and hence eliminable, in favor of some purely physical existence of the mind. As traditionally understood, both default positions have implications that seem, frankly, preposterous.[313]

Rorty also wants to move beyond these as well. But where Searle sees a minimalist realism contributing to the testimony of introspection, Rorty sees the invention of the Cartesian mind.

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that we are borrowing from rationalist and empiricists. In such a case, their theories are on the chopping block, so to speak, but not ours since we are not advancing a theory of our own about reason or the senses (and we are not advancing a theory about language). A critic might say that we are making claims about "reality," but we can claim that only academic skeptics make such claims, and that we are simply drawing attention to an aporia that their theories create (of course we have not put common sense on the chopping block). But when the subject is language itself, it seems that the idea of borrowing from dogmatists and drawing attention to an aporia does not fit. We are already speaking a language so we have not "borrowed" from anyone. Rorty's insistence that he does not have a linguistic theory seems to track along these lines. He is pointing out the metaphysician's linguistic presuppositions about representational realism, while insisting that he does not have a linguistic theory and that he is merely showing us how to redecribe in equally true perspectives.

[313] John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 49.

For Searle, Rorty's relativism is presented as the only plausible alternative since reason has failed to produce knowledge of any objective standards. Moreover, the choice we face, Searle argues, is not between well-grounded "algorithms" that will decide moral dilemmas for us—an order beyond time—or acceptance of Rorty's linguistic world-view. As we saw with McDowell's minimalist empiricism, a presupposition of external realism, in the approach Searle recommends, is implicated in the concepts of aboutness and intentionality in ways that Rorty's understanding of the norm of social consensus overlooks. As such, a linguistic understanding of dualism is not therapeutic, but rather it overlooks the world-directedness we find in the analysis of conscious introspection. This is a form of reflection that, as I understand Rorty, evinces the metaphysician's desire to determine how things are through the analysis of the contents of our conscious minds.

It is also a form of reflection that Habermas calls subject-centered philosophy of consciousness. But if we read Searle and McDowell in the way I suggest, perhaps we can connect an assumption of external realism with our "realist intuitions" that does not commit the problems Habermas thinks we commit when we engage in philosophy of consciousness. Theories that try to avoid this type of reflection (and the conclusions about "reality" thought to follow from a "correct method" of analyzing such internal thought objects) implicitly accept the cause/justification divide. What Rorty argues that we discover within the space of reasons (his nature/reason dualism) is represented as the result of a *sui generis* language-game that connected causally to the space of nature. It follows from this that, strictly speaking, any interpretation could be redscribed differently not because we could be wrong about "reality," but because our

truth and justification are both contingent upon these causal impacts rather than rational relations between justification, true beliefs, and the logical space of nature.

In other words, both the claim that my statement is true, and the justification for the claim are statements that depend on linguistic construction proffered from within the space of reasons. Here the "causes" for believing "x is true," are no different from the causes for believing "x is justified." In each case we are trapped within the space of reason (the Prison-House of Language) with no means by which to show how some sentences might correspond to things other than linguistically constituted beliefs. But, as we have seen, Habermas thinks that the intersubjectively valid communicative presuppositions that underlie discourse that aims at understanding when action is known to follow, can serve as a ground in the wake of the demise of correspondence theories of truth. But as we have also seen, Rorty rejects communication theory along with both external realism and minimalist empiricism. In doing so, he seems to accept, using the image of climbing outside our minds, that reason never breaks out of the space of reasons and into the space of nature. Or rather, that a naturalized reason dissolves any sort of two-tiered structures that permit reason to identify discursively redeemable validity structures or mind-independent entities in the world that impinge, rationally, on our beliefs.

Rorty also rejects the view of knowledge and language (prison-house skepticism) that the above characterization of our epistemic situation brings. For Rorty, we need to view our situation through the skeptic's lens (with respect to epistemology not from the point of view of the epistemological skeptic) since knowledge of how things are was the product of an illusory conception of truth to begin with. What Searle adds to this issue is a re-thinking of the presuppositions of introspection. Below I argue, drawing on Searle and Bernstein, that Rorty's

treatment of Descartes and the metaphor of the mind as a Mirror of Nature, misses an important realist insight about justification that Searle thinks is contained in the idea of introspection. I also think that when we read this idea in conjunction with Habermas and McDowell, we see how Rorty's treatment of the normativity of consensus misses what is still a defensible claim about the world-directedness of inquiry.

5.4 Descartes' Practical Concerns

The theorists I discuss, philosophers like Searle, Taylor, and Bernstein, have made the linguistic turn, but they are not willing to say, as Rorty is, that the surrounding language-using community is the only ground we need. Searle, for example, thinks that there is something important about the attempt to draw conclusions (at least some true conclusions) about the external world and personhood from an analysis of consciousness. Although he includes pragmatists among the antirealists who reduce the testimony of reflection to "less puzzling" sorts of things, Richard Bernstein, himself a pragmatist, is also critical of Rorty's deflationary (and possibly reductionist) tactics. Bernstein thinks pragmatists were correct to draw our attention to the specious, abstract debates philosophers got themselves into; however, Bernstein continues, pragmatists eventually found that they had been hoist by their own petard. Classical pragmatists such as Dewey and Charles Peirce went into "eclipse" because many theorists found that their critiques of knowledge had begun to "blur all philosophic distinctions," thus "depriving us of the analytic tools needed" to get a grip on what it means to favor liberal democracy while backing off—to an extent—from foundationalist epistemology's faulty approach to justification.[314]

[314] Richard Bernstein, *The New Constellation*, 235.

Rorty, as I interpret his body of work, tries to prevent a similar reaction to his work after *PMN*. With *CIS* and later in *Achieving Our Country*, we see how Rorty thinks that an adequate ground for our views exists in what he calls a frank ethnocentrism. Talking about how we have come to describe things in our culture, without worrying about whether our standards are ultimately "good," is sufficient as far as grounds go. But this makes conversation more important than experience. Such a view of justification is not only relative to one' culture (aside from the fact that even within our culture there exist fundamental disagreements over questions such as the proper role of government—here Rorty's public and private dichotomy will not be a useful suggestion since that split itself is in dispute), it seems to remove, from consideration, any "non-linguistic" standard such as experience or communicative rationality. But worries over a merely social conception of justification are misplaced concerns that Rorty traces back to the desire for certainty along with its alleged cure—the "discovery" of an inner world that guarantees "truth" in the external world outside us. But avoiding certainty and correspondence at all costs is a fault Bernstein sees in Rorty's linguistic pragmatism, and he appropriates a cautionary dictum from Peirce, "Do not block the road to inquiry." Even though Bernstein, like Rorty, does not think it makes sense to talk about final ends, we do see an admonishment of Rorty's linguistic pragmatism here: Metatheoretical discourse can never be a substitute for the hard work necessary "to articulate and defend, and justify one's vision of a just and good society."[315] As mentioned in the previous section, Bernstein thinks that experience, as well as what our peers allow us to say, are both implicated in justificatory practices in ways that Rorty understands to be epistemically suspect.

[315] Ibid., 253.

In this vein, Bernstein, although he too rejects the correspondence metaphysics of Descartes, offers a sympathetic reading of the Cartesian project and its underlying epistemic concerns (something missing in Rorty's analysis). To place, as Rorty does, theory on one side and political and moral issues on the other (as if the two had nothing to do with each other) is a mistake as Bernstein sees it. What Rorty's dichotomies miss is a concern (a Cartesian Anxiety) that, in a changing world that yields the possibility that our most important beliefs may not be able to withstand the challenges of relativism and superstition, these beliefs may turn out to be baseless. As a pragmatist, he avoids talk of fixed ends at which we should aim, but rather than dismissing the conviction that values need a non-contingent ground, Bernstein notices a common theme affecting Descartes as well as contemporary "foundationalists" who are uncomfortable with the idea that justification is grounded only in what others allow us to say. Bernstein writes:

> Reading the *Meditations* as a journey of the soul helps us to appreciate that Descartes' search for a foundation or Archimedean point is more than a device to solve metaphysical and epistemological problems. It is a quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us. The specter that hovers in the background of this journey is not just radical epistemological skepticism but the dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed, where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface. With a chilling clarity Descartes leads us with an apparent and ineluctable necessity to a grand and seductive Either/Or. *Either* there is some support for our being, a fixed foundation for our knowledge, *or* we cannot escape the forces of darkness that envelop us with madness, with intellectual and moral chaos.[316]

Rorty's use of either/or dichotomies, the ones Searle also criticizes as recurring tropes among antirealists, glosses the significance of the underlying issues concerning the connection between mind and world. While he does not attempt to re-think the Mind-Body problem as Searle does,

[316] Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 18.

he does share, with Searle, the same reservations towards Rorty's embrace of language and contingency.

If we think of the insecurities Bernstein references, the ideas of aboutness and intentionality Searle wants to say are implicated in rational thought about the external world, and McDowell's criticism concerning the frictionless spinning that results from a coherentist critique of the effort to establish a connection between mind and world, we see all three addressing a similar anxiety. These insecurities, Bernstein's sympathetic reading suggests, could be what motivates the attempt to locate normative friction in universal or mind-independent structures. This seems to be what Rorty has in mind when he says:

> The suggestion that truth, as well as the world, is out there is a legacy of an age in which the world was seen as the creation of a being who had a language of his own. If we cease to attempt to make sense of the idea of such a nonhuman language, we shall not be tempted to confuse the platitude that the world may cause us to be justified in believing a sentence true with the claim that the world splits itself up, on its own initiative, into sentence-shaped chunks called "facts." But if one clings to the notion of self-subsistent facts, it is easy to start capitalizing the word "truth" and treating it as something identical either with God or with the world as God's project. Then one will say, for example, that Truth is great, and will prevail.[317]

Rorty's therapeutic approach may be well received by some. A patient suffering from depression will be grateful to her therapist for giving her a fresh perspective from which to see her life. A redescription may show her that the "thing" causing her so much distress is not so bad from another point of view. Still, when the therapeutic approach is extended too far, if such an objection can be made without begging the question against Rorty, it results in what strikes me as an odd way of speaking about society. A telling contrast can be seen in the comments above: Bernstein speaks of experience; Rorty speaks of sentence-shaped chunks. Attacking the

[317] *CIS*, 5.

vocabulary of therapy seems almost gratuitous at this point, but it may be worth considering: When a patient suffers from a severe psychosis a fresh perspective is not what is needed. In fact, the person may have too many fresh perspectives and these may also change, willy-nilly, from day to day. What the person really needs from the therapist is a way to reconnect with reality.

But for Bernstein, as is the case with McDowell, it is not correct to say that we face an all or nothing choice between answering epistemological skepticism or accepting the normativity of inherited social practices. Neither accepts, as Rorty does, that the only constraints placed on us are the conversational ones extant in the surrounding culture. However, as Rorty explains, justificatory schemes that frame discourse in terms of the metaphysics of experience and answerability to the world, if talk of such things catches on, threatens to revive the "epistemology industry."[318] This is why Rorty insists on bringing his analysis back to descriptions, vocabularies, and social practices. When we understand these as consisting of causal impacts and linguistic justifications, then we can see that it is not simply that intuitions without concepts are blind, but rather that since "intuitions" and "concepts" are "terms" that we used, historically, in a larger epistemological language-game, the whole idea of justification being more than a description is the result of the very language-game we philosophers have been playing all along. If we can see our way clear to saying this, then we can see that the attempt to locate grounds is actually an attempt to show how a causal impression can function as a justification (to substitute a nonhuman ground for a human one).

[318] Ibid., 124.

5.5 The Invention of the Mind

Bernstein echoes Searle's reservations about the attempt, by antirealists, to "reduce" important ideas to something else that is seen as less important. Searle notes:

> [My aim] is to show how various puzzling phenomena, matters of mind, language, and society, can all be shown to be part of the natural world, continuous with planets, atoms, and digestion. In the case of intentionality, this problem is supposed to be exceptionally difficult because it is hard to see how "aboutness" could be a physical feature of the world in any sense. Jerry Fodor, for example, expresses a common sort of puzzlement when he writes, "If aboutness is real it must really be something else." The urge to show that intentionality is really "something else" is part of the eliminative, reductionist urge that infects much of our intellectual life. The aim is not so much to explain phenomena as to get rid of them by reducing them to less puzzling sorts of things. Thus, for example, we reduce colors to light reflectances and thereby show that red is "nothing but" a photon emission in the general range of six hundred nanometers.[319]

Jennifer Hornsby understands this as an ontological dimension contained in Descartes' *cogito*. Rorty's attempt to reduce mental states to physical brain states, she argues, glosses the importance of the thinker *qua* self-conscious thinking thing.[320] When Rorty speaks of the mind as an invention, he means both the mental property (e.g., knowing what the color red is like) and the consciousness that does the introspection.[321] While he does not deny the fact of personal, conscious introspection, the psychological nominalism he borrows from Sellars removes all normative content from introspection. However, in Searle's hands, conscious awareness is seen

[319] Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 89.
[320] Hornsby, 45.
[321] Hornsby argues that Descartes' understanding of consciousness is different from the contemporary debate concerning mental states and physical brain states. I think Rorty would probably say that if we are talking about thinking "substances," rather than our awareness of what red is like, then there is not too much left to talk about since we do not have any idea of a nonphysical substance. Instead, I propose to treat the awareness of what red is like and the awareness of myself and the fact that I am engaged in a discussion about knowledge as two different sorts of reflection upon the contents of the conscious mind. In other words (in a move that recalls Descartes' dreaming argument), we can think of being wrong about the color red, but we may not be able to doubt that we are currently engaged in a discussion concerning knowledge and awareness, even if red is not a mental thing that correctly represents an external material thing.

to contain realist intuitions concerning intentionality and aboutness. These are not analyzable in the way that the Antipodean "raw feels" were.

Earlier Rorty suggests that, when our realist intuitions present us with evidence of intractable "facts" about the world, we can handle such referential realist arguments by getting rid of our old intuitions and replacing them with new ones.[322] This move, I take it, is possible for theorists who understand the contents of empirical concepts to fall within the logical space of reasons. Searle does not accept this nor does he think that the "mind" is the result of a linguistic maneuver. But this is, as I have argued in this dissertation, exactly what we see in the move from conceptual to propositional knowledge. The empirical content of our beliefs is seen to resemble something outside. But this threatens to lead us back to the Myth of the Given.

What I am suggesting is that if we regard conceptual knowledge as propositional, then Hegel's analysis of sense certainty (received from outside) and concepts (activity of the understanding that involves conscious awareness and personal reflection), becomes an analysis of sentences that we construct as we communicate our views to others. Davidson argues that "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except for another belief."[323] This, in my view, creates a regress of justification (i.e., sentences describing other sentences). But if aboutness is a realist intuition that we cannot do without, such an insight, if sound, seems like a concept available at the level of personal introspection. The shift to propositional knowledge

[322] Bernstein, *The Pragmatic Turn*, 124.

[323] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 14, here McDowell quotes Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", reprinted in Ernest LePore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 307-19. Conceived in such a way it does invite the "skeptical" question, How can one we be deceived if there really is no way to detect the deception? A similar question was raised by OK Bousma with respect to Cartesian skepticism (the perfect deception is no deception at all). However, it does make sense to imagine, that at some point in the future, we might invent new scientific instruments capable of detecting what is currently undetectable given our limitations. See, O.K. Bouwsma, "Descartes' Evil Genius." *The Philosophical Review* 58 (1949): 141-151.

seems to obscure this fact. McDowell called Rorty's sharp distinction between the space of nature and the logical space of reasons a distinction that revealed a blind spot in his thinking. It may be that the shift to propositional knowledge itself carries with it the same sort of blind spot. If everything we "say" is propositional (which is tautologically true), then we are always in the space of reasons because speaking is always in this realm. But in saying this, we shift aboutness and the connection between mind and world out of our analysis without argument. Those who question the soundness of this shift are understood, through the interpretive lens Rorty constructs using the Myth of the Given, as theorists who are trying to find a nonhuman ground (a contemporary version of the search for God). But the central tenent of this shift holds that the testimony of introspection is either given or it is propositional. But as given, it is empty until it is spoken about, and speaking, as such, is understood as construction within the *sui generis* space of reasons, and hence non-representational. So, such testimony cannot be evidence of the truth of referential realism. In short, what is Given is treated as metaphysical while what is regarded as propositional is not, even though both can be regarded as immediately present. Avoiding the testimony of introspection, in this sense, can be characterized itself as a myth of the Myth of the Given.[324]

Consider the following characterization of Descartes' project as Rorty understands it. Here we see the Cartesian mind created largely through "verbal maneuvers." This makes the "mind" nothing more than a belief we have due to the way our language works. As Rorty observes:

[324] See Andrew Bailey, "The Myth of the Myth of the Given," *Manuscrito, Revista Internacional de Filosofia* 27, no. 2 (2004), 321–360.

> I think Descartes is dimly envisaging a similarity between the "simple natures" which we know in mathematical physics (which may be the *quaedam simplicial et universalia* in question) and the colors themselves. Colors, in his official, Galilean, metaphysical view, are secondary qualities waiting upon analysis into simples, but epistemologically they seem, like pain, to have the same sort of primitive inescapability as the simple natures themselves. He could not make the analogy explicit without setting his foot on the road toward Lockean empiricism. But neither could he give it up without falling back into the old Aristotelian distinctions between the sensitive and the intellectual souls…I think, most of the work of changing the notion of "mind" to be done under the table, not by any explicit argument but simply by verbal maneuvers which reshuffled the deck slightly, and slightly differently, at each passage in which the mind-body distinction came to the fore.
>
> If I am right in thinking that Descartes's badly argued hunch, the one which made him able to see pains and thoughts as modes of a single substance, was that indubitability was the common factor they shared with nothing physical, then we can see him as working his way around toward a view in which indubitability is no longer the mark of eternality, but rather of something for which the Greeks had no name-consciousness.[325]

Rorty sees Descartes muddling through a confused treatment of simples and universals which leads ultimately to the creation of a nonphysical mind. The conclusion that mind exists stems from the difference between my awareness of colors and something else (simple natures). Since my awareness of colors seems not to be something physical, my mind must be something nonphysical; i.e., since I cannot doubt that I have an awareness of what color is like, there must be a nonphysical consciousness that is responsible for this.

I think we can find, in Searle's treatment of introspection and external realism, a concept of agency that does allow us to retain the reflexive capacity that dualists think essential to agency. Rorty's analysis does not aim at this. His analysis of the testimony of introspection sees the "raw feels" of the Antipodeans as reducible to something else (not as evidence of agency).

[325] Ibid., 57-58.

5.6 Raw feels and Qualia

Rorty's Antipodeans do not report on their internal mental states. Instead, they report on what happens, physically, when they experience what we would call a feeling of pain. Those of us who have the language of raw feels—those of us who reflect and know introspectively what pain feels like—may wonder if the Antipodeans also feel pain. Rorty wants to avoid discourse concerning what, if anything, is going on in the minds of others. As I argue above, the connections between positivism, behaviorism, and post-positivist linguistic philosophy make reflection on the contents of one's conscious mind, an activity that moves us back into (or risks moving us back into) subject-centered philosophy of consciousness.[326] This is something Rorty thinks we can avoid if we accept that languages never represent anything real, nor do they contain rational structures that enable us to distinguish between valid of moral statements and ideological ones.

But can we really avoid talk about "other minds" through a theory that advocates for a "linguistic" understanding of minds as Rorty's does? If the "mind" is really its physical brain processes, then what are descriptions? Or to put it inelegantly, do not descriptions need describers and does talk of this sort move us away from behaviorist discourse about observable behavior and back in the direction of reflection on the so-called "raw" feels?[327] As we see above

[326] This is an example of reviving the "epistemology industry." See *CIS*, 124.

[327] I use the term describer for convenience sake. An interpreter is, in Heidegger, an instance of Dasein (culturally-situated, concernful-being-in-the-world). An issue we see, after Nietzsche and Heidegger, concerns how, if it is possible at all, human beings might obtain objective knowledge. One fears that human prejudices and our desire to predict and control nature will warp the interpretive process to such a degree that all attempts to come to an understanding in language will be marred by power relations extant in human institutions and conventions. Rorty and Habermas do not think, as Foucault does, that power relations present impossible obstacles for a good, power free, conversation (although Rorty's treatment of power is rather dismissive unlike Habermas's). The reason I think power and motives talk is important is that it moves the discussion closer to what philosophers used to call human nature. If we are going to avoid "doing metaphysics" then how do we talk about motives? These are internal. Are these the product of conscious introspection or do these functions like moral sentiments? Moral sentiments talk

in Searle's thought, it is important that speakers have (or are capable of having) intensions. This is significant because, as Searle understands it, intentionality is a phenomenon that can be simulated by a programmed machine, but not duplicated by mere programming. Even if the linguistic "outputs" fool us into thinking that we are having a conversation with a being that possesses awareness and intentionality as we do, the programming does not understand. It is all "syntax but no semantics."[328] In my view, Rorty's linguistic redescription depicts speakers in a similar manner. We are programmed with language, we adapt to different situations, and we describe and redescribe the world in ways that produce effects in our fellows. Reflection stays focused on observable sounds and signs, rather than on ideas, natures, human natures, the subject/object relationship, moods, feelings, as well as talk of authenticity.

Judging from the skeptical reactions of his critics, Rorty's linguistic approach may be more behaviorist in its orientation than Rorty would like to admit. His critique of Cartesian minds allows us to talk about how things seem to us only if we begin by saying that how things seem is never anything more than just a personal report. The moment we try to attribute additional significance to the testimony of introspection, we commit ourselves to using the language of objectivity: The correspondence theories privileged by the Enlightenment. For Rorty, it we can prevent an ontological gap from opening between mind and world, we will not need the language of objectivity in the first place. But Rorty understands this "gap," to some degree, as a pseudo-issue that got created by the metaphysical game philosophers played in the Modern period beginning with Descartes. Understanding the issue this way, as Rorty does,

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would move us closer to Anglo-American ethical theories. This tradition of ethics is heavily imbued with metaphysics talk (human nature, innate ideas, and innate, universal feelings).

[328] John R. Searle, "Minds, Brains and Programs," in *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences* vol. 3. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 353.

makes closing the ontological gap an issue that requires new ways of speaking rather than new theories.

But what if one thinks that socialization does not go all the way down? Rorty forces us to admit that we are playing a language-game when we try to talk about the testimony of introspection. But this begs the question. If Rorty's embrace of the Linguistic Turn ignores important non-linguistic, introspective phenomena, then his critique fails to account for at least one dimension, the reflective, of personhood. This is why I think Searle's treatment of introspection is valuable.

Like Rorty, Searle encourages a break with past theories, but his approach does not lead to a separation between the private and public spheres. Nor does Searle understand theoretical activity as a form of narrative creation that transpires at the level of language and culture:

> I do not believe that we live in two worlds, the mental and the physical—much less in three worlds, the mental, the physical, and the cultural—but in one world, and I want to describe the relations between some of the many parts of that one world. I want to explain the general structure of several of the philosophically most puzzling parts of reality. Specifically, I want to explain certain structural features of mind, language, and society, and then show how they all fit together.[329]

For Searle, the central issue concerns what he calls "external realism." This is the idea that "there is a real world that exists independently of us, independently of our experiences, our thoughts, our language."[330] This conviction is experienced by human beings pre-reflectively. A better understanding of the relationship between mind, matter, and society will show how it makes sense now to talk about both consciousness and external realism.

[329] John Searle, *Mind, Language, and Society*, 6.
[330] Ibid., 10.

> Both dualism and materialism rest on a series of false assumptions. The main false assumption is that if consciousness is really a subjective, qualitative phenomenon, then it cannot be part of the material, physical world. And indeed, given the way the terms have been defined since the seventeenth century, that assumption is true by definition. The way Descartes defined "mind" and "matter," they are mutually exclusive. If something is mental, it cannot be physical; if it is physical, it cannot be mental. I am suggesting that we must abandon not only these definitions but also the traditional categories of "mind," "consciousness," "matter," "mental," "physical," and all the rest as they are traditionally construed in our philosophical debates.[331]

Searle thinks the categories are problematic because they do not allow us to account for the testimony of introspection. He does not wish to abandon realism as Rorty does. Searle's biological naturalism might place him in the materialist's camp; however, I think Searle (like Rorty) wants to move beyond distinctions like this.

What seems important to me is that Searle leaves space for a theory of reference that I would describe as both realist and referentialist. Rorty's determination to move beyond correspondence metaphysics creates problems at the level of personal introspection. But in avoiding subject/object thinking, Rorty's linguistic approach exacts too high a price. In a statement that echoes McDowell, Searle writes:

> It is true that we need a vocabulary to *describe* or *state* the facts. But just as it does not follow from the fact that I see reality always from a point of view and under certain aspects that I never directly perceive reality, so from the fact that I must have a vocabulary in order to state facts, or a language in order to identify and describe the facts, it simply does not follow that the facts I am describing or identifying have no independent existence….It is a use-mention fallacy to suppose that the linguistic conceptual nature of the *identification* of a fact requires that the *fact identified* be itself linguistic in nature. Facts are conditions that make statements true, but they are not identical with their linguistic descriptions. We invent words to state facts and to name things, but it does not follow that we invent the facts or the things.[332]

[331] Searle, 50-51.
[332] Searle, 22.

Searle is concerned to avoid the relativism he sees in Rorty's thought. He is also critical of the relativism implicit in his critique of the language of objectivity. If we cannot say that anything is true with respect to scientific knowledge, then it seems the same limitations on reason and rationality will prevent us from distinguishing between good and bad arguments in political and ethical debates.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

> "What is the relation of language to thought?" We should not try to answer such questions, for doing so leads either to the evident failures of reductionism or to the short-lived successes of expansionism. We should restrict ourselves to questions like "Does our use of these words get in the way of our use of those other words?"[333]
>
> —Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*

> Since "truths" and "facts" are pretty nearly equivalent notions, I think it important to get rid of both. So I still want to defend the claim that there were no truths before human beings began using language: for all true sentences S, it was true back then that S, but there were no "wordly items"—no facts, no truths.[334]
>
> —Richard Rorty, *Rorty and His Critics*

This dissertation has raised a question that can be answered very easily: In response to the question, "What do our words represent?" we might answer simply that they represent Reality. There are reasons to think, in spite of the seeming plausibility of this answer, that it is inadequate. Yet, as the ongoing debate examined in this dissertation illustrates, the issue concerning language and representation is far from settled.

Richard Rorty has done as much as any philosopher in the Anglo-American tradition to keep this debate going. The issue for him, we might say, even at the risk of back-tracking a little, is settled in many ways. When we humans invented this little thing called knowing, to borrow a turn of phrase from Friedrich Nietzsche, truth and justification, in Rorty's pragmatic understanding, became a matter of answerability to a way of life. Truth is not in the world because sentences are not in the world on their own.

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[333] *CIS*, 12.
[334] Richard Rorty, "Response to Robert Brandom," in *Rorty and His Critics*, 184.

But the lively and provocative ways in which Rorty defends his thesis have sparked numerous criticisms. One reason for the criticism is that, stated in simple terms, Rorty defends a cultural relativist position. According to the relativist, there are no universal standards nor is it correct to say that our practices can ever be right with respect to how things are in a mind-independent world. But since the time of Plato, philosophy has seen itself as the search for the Good life. And this search focuses our attention on the need for standards, especially if we begin to suspect that the ones we have inherited are not really good for everyone concerned. To say that we cannot obtain knowledge of a standard that justifies our beliefs, is to say that we must accept or reject our current practices without the aid of transcendent or guiding principles located "outside" the currently accepted social practices.

But Rorty's "relativism" goes further than the typical cultural relativism debates go. Nietzsche had asked, in *Beyond Good and Evil*, why we wanted Kantian synthetic *a priori* judgments—why human beings felt the need to be right with respect to something greater than us. Rather than asking how we can plausibly defend such a conception of Rational justification, Nietzsche writes, "it is high time to replace the Kantian question, "How are synthetic judgments *a priori* possible?" by another question, "Why is belief in such judgments necessary?"[335] Rorty's therapeutic approach asks a similar question. But Rorty avoids what he calls the "inverted Platonism" of Nietzsche.[336] Rorty does not "ground" standards in knowledge of human biological (material) life nor does he attempt to transcend it. Both are seen by Rorty as part and parcel of the metaphysician's trade. If we can see our way clear to accepting the contingency of our settled convictions, if we can accept that human reason never grasps

[335] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 19.
[336] *CIS*, 33.

"reality," we can begin to see our descriptions as tools for coping. Sentences are not true with respect to how things are in the world. Sentences are "true" with respect to what other speakers in our group allow us to say. This is the heart of Rorty's therapeutic cure to what ails us.

But this "cure," as some philosophers understand it, has a long list of side-effects. For one thing, it leads to the ethnocentricity of all knowledge claims. Human beings, or so the fear goes in this picture of philosophy, are seen never actually to have been in contact with "reality" in the first place. Rorty's use of the idea of final vocabularies has a dual purpose: First it makes language the natural home of a human being. This view of language is captured in Rorty's phrase The Linguistic Turn. Moreover, it is consistent with a change that has occurred in the twentieth century in both continental and analytic philosophy. When Rorty speaks of us as people who "carry about a set of words,"[337] he places, in plain English, an idea captured in Gadamer's notion of the linguisticality of the understanding—that "man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic"—at the center of his work.[338] Second, it allows Rorty to attribute a perspective to critics of his "relativism" that depicts them as theorists still operating within the old philosophical paradigm. They are the ones intent on speaking about reality; whereas ironists, the philosophers who agree with Rorty, realize that no such view of Reality—of a connection between mind and world—can be plausibly defended. The Linguistic Turn, understood in this second sense, is not a therapeutic side-stepping of the issue concerning standards of justification. It is, as I have argued in this dissertation, the argument that any attempt to speak about standards is an attempt to get behind language and view Reality in itself. It is not epistemological skepticism but, rather, skepticism with respect to epistemology.

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[337] *CIS*, 74.
[338] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 443.

So, in questioning what we can and cannot say about "reality" as we move from conceptual to propositional knowledge, we run the risk of either (1) begging the question against Rorty or (2) falling back into the Myth of the Given. But the diverse collection of critics, parsed together in this dissertation, do not see themselves doing either one of these things in their respective critiques of Rorty's pragmatism. In fact, John McDowell understands questions concerning the connection between mind and world to be fundamental. Far from question begging, he thinks the challenge we face is one that requires careful navigation between two equally undesirable poles: The Myth of the Given and coherentism:

> It is true that modern philosophy is pervaded by apparent problems about knowledge in particular. But I think it is helpful to see those apparent problems as more or less inept expressions of a deeper anxiety—an inchoately felt threat that a way of thinking we find ourselves falling into leaves minds simply out of touch with the rest of reality, not just questionably capable of getting to know about it.[339]

McDowell understands Rorty's pragmatism to avoid falling back into the Given. However, he thinks it does so at great cost. By placing meaning, understanding, and justification within an isolated and *sui generis* space of reasons, Rorty's determination to dissolve rather than solve the problem of representation, collapses the distinction between mind and world leaving us with a coherentism that he depicts as the only position available—provided we wish to avoid doing metaphysics in our discourse.

Yet, the biperspectival view in *CIS*, a work that I read as a continuation of the argument in *PMN*, contains both theoretical and practical dimensions. Rorty does not wish to become politically and publically useless as he abandons universalism, a charge he levels against fellow

[339] McDowell, *Mind and World*, xiii.

ironists (perhaps incorrectly) Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida.[340] So with this in mind, we can read Rorty's saying that socialization "goes all the way down" as a gloss on his deeper commitment to antirepresentationalism.[341] For Rorty, this argues not for a commitment to a *tabula rasa* theory of human nature but rather for the idea that sensibility is empty until it receives "conceptual" structure from us. But sensibility is not the only thing that is empty in Rorty's analysis. Rorty's updated "blank slate" theory shows us that justification and truth depend on the sentences we construct within the logical space of reasons. This is a result of the shift from conceptual to propositional knowledge. So "human nature" is the result of contingent social practices and normative beliefs that are constructed from that same fabric—the web of beliefs instilled in us by the linguistic tradition we inherit and that we express in propositional form. As such, human beliefs represent only other beliefs; they never represent the world (rationally in the correspondence sense) or anything inside each of us at the deepest level of the self.

The significance of the preceding statement can be seen against the backdrop of McDowell's concept of *Bildung*. McDowell thinks, as does Rorty, that concepts are made by the mind. Moreover, with respect to the Given and in contrast to the views of empiricists like Locke, neither Rorty nor McDowell regard the gap between Mind (or Language) and World as something that we can close by connecting thought with the Given. However, McDowell thinks that *Bildung* (education or socialization) is a process that is built on top of our animal nature. The attainment of conceptual capacities through *Bildung* provides us humans with concepts that are already implicated in receptivity—concepts are made, but they are also forced on us by the

[340] *CIS*, 68.
[341] Ibid., 185.

world.[342] When we judge that a connection exists between mind and world, we are not operating independently of the space of nature although our judgment is made within the space of reasons. And, most importantly for the successful implementation of his solution to the skeptical problem raised by the Myth of the Given, this process, McDowell explains, is not something that can be described from outside the space of reasons. We cannot, as Rorty does through the use of his "outsider's" descriptive program, regard nature as containing only causes (sensory impacts received through receptivity). As we develop our conceptual capacities we utilize the faculty of spontaneity that is (and has been) in contact with the world. The "structure of the space of reasons," according to McDowell, "is not constituted in splendid isolation from anything merely human. The demands of reason are essentially such that a human upbringing can open a person's eyes to them."[343]

In the present context, we can understand socialization and nature if we put it rather inelegantly and ask: When we reflect and speak, what is it in a person that is responsible for this activity?[344] Rorty says the world does not speak, but once we have "programmed ourselves with

[342] McDowell speaks in Aristotelian terms about *Bildung* suggesting that, as we grow, our conceptual activities develop in conjunction with the world. Judgments, as I read McDowell, become habit forming in Aristotle's sense of *ethos*. So, a person who had developed good character tends to make good choices in the same way that a person with conceptual capacities tends to judge entities with respect to the external world, rather than with reference merely to other beliefs. Although McDowell operates within the analytical tradition and he does not claim an insider's hermeneutical perspective for himself, I read his suggestion above as a kind of Heideggerian conception of openness to Being. Such considerations would take us outside the scope of the present discussion, but I regard such "knowledge" as (potentially), a post-metaphysical ground that is not exclusively conceptual or propositional but rather takes an insider's perspective that utilizes talk of authenticity with respect to the relationship one takes up towards the entities one encounters in the world. However, my concerns with linguistic idealism and correspondence may still remain inadequately addressed even if we do admit talk of nonpropositional knowledge.

[343] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 92.

[344] I realize that a question such as this runs the risk of begging the question in favor of the existence of something "fundamental" inside a person. In response to the claim that all descriptions need describers, we might ask if all lightening need lightening-ers? Certainly we have seen intentionality removed from nature. Homeric Gods and Lamarckian environmentally induced needs and behaviors are no longer required for a scientific explanation of natural phenomena; however, it is not clear to me that we can remove human intentionality from our explanation of choice without embracing a reductionist materialism of the sort that Rorty wants to avoid. Whatever that something

a language" we can begin to speak.[345] But this codifies the nature/reason dichotomy and leaves us to wonder if our reasons are ever in contact with anything external to the mind. Moreover, the attempt to describe this programming process (to talk as Descartes and Locke did about human nature and as realists today such as McDowell and Searle do about language and external realism) is represented, by Rorty, as an attempt to get behind language—to traverse the nature/reason gap—and obtain truths that have nothing to do with the space of reasons where justifications are constructed. If we cannot describe something as being on both sides of the cause/justification divide, then we may not be able to break-out of the "Prison-House of Language" and identify even a minimal connection between mind and world. So the central issue, to put it now less inelegantly, is this: Do assertoric propositions ever contain content that represents anything real? With respect to Cartesian soul substances, the theorists above agree that the answer is no; however, with respect to moral and scientific knowledge claims, they think that the sharp nature/reason dualism prevents us from seeing the importance of external realism and world-directedness.

6.1 Theories and Background Assumptions

The issues raised in this dissertation concerning the connection between mind and world also have moral and political implications. Theorists such as Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor think that Rorty's insistence that justification is a matter of conformity to social practices

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is inside, if there is something fundamental that motivates our choices, it need not be regarded as a Cartesian, nonphysical essence. Still, an explanation that limits itself to observable behavior is a perspective that, in my view, makes assumptions about the physical world, even though its "therapeutic" goals move in a less "reductionist" direction. It seems that some of the issues raised in this debate contain traces of earlier debates concerning free will, determinism, and the importance of human freedom and responsibility.

[345] *CIS*, 6.

alone, fails to account for the role that other dimensions of human life play as we talk about our lives together. Specifically, our embeddedness in the lifeworld (and discourse about our situation) has normative importance as we come to an understanding of ourselves and our relationship to the wider social world. Taylor, in particular, insists that our responsibilities to our fellows do require a post-metaphysical anchor. To say contrariwise is to open the door to a form of non-realism, one that fails to capture the ways in which nonpropositional experiences shape human beings and are implicated in what Taylor considers genuine moral choices.

Rorty's argument with Taylor, one that Taylor characterizes as an old debate that has finally entered its "*n*th round," concerns whether or not we even need a post-metaphysical ground, even if we could defend it as plausible.[346] Here again we see a confluence of themes as we move from the arguments contained in *PMN* to the ones in *CIS* (replete with their moral and political implications). Rorty argues that all we really need to participate in the moral and political life of our communities is simply to begin speaking about how things seem to us at present. No further theorizing is necessary. Becoming comfortable with contingency, as he makes clear in *CIS*, requires acceptance of the fact that our concrete talk about the goings on in our society is the only ground we ever had in the first place.

These sorts of philosophical debates expose differences that seem difficult to resolve. We might even characterize their disagreement saying, figuratively of course, that Taylor thinks Rorty is blind; whereas, Rorty thinks Taylor is hallucinating. But at times, Rorty's claims do seem to be less therapeutic and closer to what Taylor characterizes as claims that evince a form of non-realism. Even though Rorty would like to focus on his positive recommendations for

[346] Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 158.

proceeding free from metaphysics—proposals he outlines in *CIS*—the substance of his argument with Taylor centers on claims Rorty makes that are underwritten by the linguistic historicism for which he argued earlier in *PMN*. In spite of his insisting that one does not need a theory to criticize, Rorty does seem, in my view, to have a theory. So while Taylor understands and agrees with the compelling arguments Rorty makes for abjuring the need to answer epistemological skepticism, he reads Rorty not simply as a therapeutic philosopher, but as one who is advancing a theory that connects his linguistic pragmatism to arguments about the limits of human reason.

And it should also be pointed out that, in Taylor's view, having a theory of reason is not a bad thing. This is another key to their disagreement: the usefulness of theory. In response to the criticisms Dreyfus and Taylor make concerning non-realism in Rorty's pragmatism, Rorty writes:

> As a good pragmatist, I want to replace the notion of "discovery of essence" with that of "appropriateness of a vocabulary for a purpose." This will enable us to do everything we could do before, except continue the Western metaphysical tradition. I think that the only way to construct such a "grounding" is to enter into an unholy alliance with Cartesianism and scientific realism. Dreyfus's and Taylor's desire for such grounding has led them, I think, to just this *renversement des alliances.*[347]

Taylor does not think that walking away from important theoretical issues will permit us to do everything we could before. He thinks it important that our inherited tradition contains (and the contents of this tradition shape Rorty's thinking as well) the dramatic shifting of alliances occurring in the historical changes we witnessed as we moved from radical empiricism to postmodernism (Logical Positivism to post-positivist linguistic philosophy). The choice, Taylor

[347] Richard Rorty, "A Reply to Dreyfus and Taylor," *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. 34, no. 1 (Sep., 1980), 46.

argues, is not between scientific realism and social constructivism. It is between a holistic view that incorporates some of what was right with representational realism and one that leaves us with a non-realism that threatens the attempt to move our discourse about how we live and treat others forward. Telling the skeptic to "get lost" rather than answering him is not therapeutic, in Taylor's view; it is walking away and remaining trapped "under the canvas" that epistemological skepticism placed us under.[348]

To say that the repudiation of fundamental ontology commits one to an antirepresentationalist view of language strikes Taylor as an overreaction to what is negative in classical epistemology. What I understand him to say is that the attempt to locate rational structures that plausibly facilitate a distinction between good (moral) and bad arguments, is not continuing the Western metaphysical tradition in the unacceptable way that Rorty describes. For Rorty, doing philosophy without "mirrors" requires avoiding such attempts at grounding moral and political beliefs in timeless, universal structures. He admits that he cannot show that his principles are "better" than those of a Nazi, for example, but he does not think that such a demonstration is possible or necessary. My critics, Rorty writes, see

> my refusal to take on the job of answering Hitler as a sign of irresponsible "decisionism" or "relativism." But I have always (well, not always, but for the last twenty years or so) been puzzled about what was supposed to count as a knockdown answer to Hitler. Would it answer him to tell him that there was a God in Heaven who was on our side? How do we reply to him when he asks for evidence for this claim? Would it answer him to say that his views are incompatible with the construction of a society in which communication is undistorted, and that his refusal of a voice to his opponents contradicts the presupposition of his own communicative acts? What if Hitler rejoins that to interpret truth as a product of free and open encounters rather than as what emerges from the genius of a destined leader begs the question against him? (What if, in other words, he goes Heideggerian on us?) Richard Hare's view that

[348] Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 159.

> there is no way to "refute" a sophisticated, consistent, passionate psychopath—for example, a Nazi who would favor his own elimination if he himself turned out to be Jewish—seems to me right, but to show more about the idea of "refutation" than about Nazism.[349]

Taylor and Habermas would say that distinguishing between a moral claim and an *ad hoc* defense of one's present position is exactly what reason should do. But such a defense would commit one to the view that human beings are answerable to something greater than each other. So in accepting the negative outcome of his view above, Rorty is consistent. As Rorty has explained, any attempt to ground a conception of justice, in his view, is an attempt to buttress our validity claims with structures thought to be independent of our current practices. Universal validity and correspondence to how things are (the sorts of arguments we see in and Taylor, Habermas, and McDowell), are not the solution to the problems rooted in epistemological skepticism, they are part of the problem.

In the paragraph above, we see what appears to be a kind of equality of claimants. All speakers are equal in that they are all producing words and operating with what we assume are actual beliefs. We do not know if they truly believe these things or if they think these views are required by the dictates of reason, nor do we know if they are merely repeating the values instilled in them by the dominant culture. But we know, at some basic level (the justificatory side of the cause/justification distinction), that they are articulating their beliefs in such a way that they have meaning to us. So perhaps there are received impressions that are also implicated in our understanding of what constitutes a good or bad argument. It seems to some theorists that a host of other background assumptions are implicated in our communicative practices. When I refer to "cutting hair" and "cutting grass," a competent speaker of English implicitly knows that

[349] Rorty, "Truth and Freedom: A Reply to Thomas McCarthy," 636.

there are different tools involved. Such assumptions need not be spelled-out. The Davidsonian idea, which Rorty makes a central feature of his linguistic pragmatism, is the idea that "nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except for another belief." This, I take it, is a theoretical understanding of language and justification.[350] As such, focusing on language, as if we are focusing on a concrete activity and abjuring theory, is a recommendation for side-stepping theory—one that is itself theoretical.

It also seems to contain a gross "egalitarianism": it seems to bring all speakers down to the same level as people who defend their beliefs with other beliefs. The qualities that we possess, due to our embeddedness in our respective societies, are not analyzable only as physical impacts (causes) and their linguistic effects. It seems that the experiences of a member of a racial minority group living in a discriminatory society, a female employee in a male dominated work environment, or a person who lived through the Great Depression and frequently went to bed hungry, all have had experiences that have something to do with embeddedness, sensibility, normative rightness. To focus on the words that people produce, and to dismiss the fact that normative judgments are frequently similar due to similarities in the experiences of people, seems to place too much significance on the sentences we construct. In fact, Rorty admits that "patterns" might develop anytime people get together do things, but these patterns do not tell us anything significant. What is more, the tendency of us humans to pay attention to patterns is of a piece with the same need we have to locate essences "outside" our current cultural practices. Again we see Rorty separating justification, as an intellectual activity that involves reason and

[350] We should note that Rorty and Davidson refrain from asking Pontius Pilot's question with respect to Truth. But with respect to the concept of justification, they are asking the general question, "What is justification?"

language, from other experiences that seem to be connected to what we say in ways that are perhaps more than just contingent causal relations.

Bernstein complains earlier that Rorty eliminates experience from his pragmatism, but, I would argue, Rorty does not fail to take certain forms of "experience" into account in *CIS* as he separates the public and private spheres. Here the experiences of the private ironist do seem to be relevant. Her "wisdom" shows her that the empirical content of her beliefs can never apply to the external world "correctly," or rationally. But since she is an ironist, who is also a liberal, she keeps this "insight" to herself. We might ask if there are other received impressions that count as something we should think of as knowledge. Even though we may not be able to justify experiences or feelings with words, there might be background assumptions that figure into justification in ways that do not fit within Rorty's nature/reason dualism. Rorty would point out, in light of the Myth of the Given, that the second we do attempt to justify we are putting into propositional form received impressions. As such, this activity now transpires, or is analyzed in such a way that it is seen to occur, within the space of reasons as opposed to nature. As Taylor points out, I may interpret a person's meaning when she points at a rabbit and speaks in a variety of different ways. But if I did not have a stable background, I would not even be able to pick out the rabbit in the first place. If I felt dizzy, as one does before fainting, my "background" would be spinning, making it difficult for the rabbit to come to sight. As a good interpreter, I must assume many "stabilities" that become essential parts of my interpretation before I can even begin talking about justification.

The ease with which Rorty's analysis slips in and out of "vocabularies," "sentences," and "descriptions" that, he argues, can be substituted for other "descriptions," strikes me as one that

tries too hard to limit itself to observable behavior. It seems that other considerations, such as the role of background assumptions, received impressions, and possibly the concept of "realist intuitions," in spite of the Cartesian sounding tones that this last idea strikes, should be a part of our analysis of truth and justification. These might yield considerations that impinge on our convictions concerning the treatment of others. That is, it could be Rational to assume that there is a mind-independent "reality" that must exist in order for us to even begin speaking coherently. Taylor acknowledges that Heidegger has already shown us that our ability to get around in the world involves weaving together what we understand as "explicit knowledge" with the "unarticulated know-how" we receive from the surrounding culture. There are good reasons to think, as Taylor explains, that "antifoundationalists agree" with him on the importance of background assumptions.[351] However, they soon part ways on the issue of representation.

Taylor, echoing McDowell, sees a dualism in Rorty that underwrites his linguistic pragmatism. Taylor's holism suggests that Cartesian dualism receives a contemporary ("more sophisticated") expression with the linguistic turn. With Quine, we see "representations" reconceived, "no longer as 'ideas' but as sentences." This creates a duality of "Inside/Outside" accounts of knowing. But it also leads to non-realist theories that "deny some crucial commonsense distinction between reality and our picture of it: the world as it is versus the world as we see it; what is really moral right versus what we think is right."[352] In spite of Rorty's insistence that he is opposed to all forms of representationalism, Taylor argues that the move from conceptual to propositional knowledge is actually a representationalist theory of knowledge in which sentences take the place of ideas—thus leading to the "Inside/Outside" skepticism we

[351] Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy," 161-62.
[352] Ibid., 168.

find in the analytic tradition. This gets reproduced, not only in debates concerning moral knowledge, but in the whole discourse concerning the privacy of thought (Private Language Argument) and the consequences for our views of the self growing out of artificial intelligence research.[353] Taylor thinks that, in a sense, all of our knowledge is "mediated," but this means that background knowledge and implicit know-how are an important part of how we see ourselves and the world. The epistemological skepticism that he and Rorty both deplore is seen, by Taylor, to grow of the linguistically-construed representationalist view of knowledge that Rorty holds (unwittingly).

The blind spot McDowell thinks is contained in Rorty's treatment of the cause/justification distinction is now seen here, in Taylor, as a privileging of linguistic representation and a relegation of relevant background assumptions to a position, in the space of nature, of causes that do not justify (even McDowell, according to Taylor, acquiesces here by speaking the language of Sellars when he holds that "the only inhabitants of the space of reasons are beliefs"[354]). If we truly move beyond foundationalism, Taylor maintains, we will see that we are connected to Reality through the implicit and unstated background assumptions that are always involved in our interpretations. And, most importantly, these connections are not

[353] See Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," 265. Taylor echoes Searle's criticism of Rorty on intentionality. Moreover, Taylor does not accept Rorty's therapeutic gloss on the issue concerning the self. Rorty, in Taylor's view, is not "redescribing" when he agrees with philosophers who deny that there exists any significant difference between human and machine "intentions." Taylor notes that the "most striking example [of this sort of antirealist argument] can be seen in the work of philosophers like Dan Dennett, who are enamored of the computer model in cognitive psychology. They want to deny the distinction between living beings who calculate and machines who 'calculate'; namely that meaning and intentionality are ascribed only to the first in an underived sense, that there really is something it is to be a human or a bat, but not to be a fifth-generation computer. The reason for denying this distinction is characteristically that, following their view of what it must be to observe and discover meaning or intentionality in any 'system', these would have to be ascribed to animals and computers on the some basis, i.e., that classing them as 'intentional systems' offers the best explanatory purchase on them. It is significant that Rorty sides foursquare with Dennett against Nagel on this issue."

[354] Taylor, Rorty and Philosophy," 169.

linguistic entities, nor can they be grasped by the analysis of final vocabularies in the way that Rorty does it. For Taylor: "This is nonconceptual; or, put another way, language isn't playing any direct role. Through language, we (humans) have the capacity to focus on things, to pick an X out as an X; we pick it out as something that (correctly) bears a description "X," and this puts our identification in the domain of potential critique (Is this really an X? Is the vocabulary to which X belongs the appropriate one for this domain/purpose? etc.)."[355] Such an understanding makes sense of our realist intuitions. The conviction that I am speaking about a mind-independent world is, as Taylor understands it, part of my pre-linguistic background. The idea that we can speak authentically about the surrounding world and our moral commitments to others while, at the same time, believing that there really are no standards other than the ones we give ourselves (including acceptance also that we can never obtain the world-directedness of justificatory schemes aside from what others allow us to say), is the outcome of a highly theoretical argument that Taylor believes has gone horribly off-track.

These intuitions are not "rational" in the context of the debate concerning justification in light of the idea of the Given. But there may be ways to make rational sense of them without accepting the linguistic idealism that both Taylor and McDowell suggest Rorty's pragmatism brings to the fore. One possibility, in my understanding of the issue, can be found in Habermas. He speaks of what he calls the "material substratum" that underlies the lifeworld.[356] This substratum is not a background assumption within the lifeworld but, rather, a substratum from which the lifeworld is constructed. Rorty would see such talk as either metaphysical—as an

[355] Ibid., 163-64.

[356] See Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action Volume 2*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 233. He writes, "With its material substratum the lifeworld stands under contingent conditions that appear from the perspective of its members as barriers to the realization of plans of action rather than as constraints on self-steering. This substratum had to be maintained by social labor drawing upon scarce resources."

attempt to get behind language—or as a "necessary" presupposition. But here, such a "necessity" would, no doubt, be represented by Rorty as so thin, a kind of universal signified perhaps, that it really would not do any real work in our understanding of the surrounding world and our commitments to others (Wittgenstein's wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it).

6.2 Coming to Sight: Language, Theory, and present-at-hand

My musings here are not yet working proposals, but what I would like to see is a discourse that connects Habermas's material substratum to a discourse that makes sense of what we care about. I realize that Cartesian metaphysics attempts to connect the certainty of the *cogito* to a mind-independent reality that we all share, so I do not want to attempt to traverse the gap from a subjective "given" to an external, empirical truth in the same way. But in a lifeworld-centered approach to knowledge, a concept that McDowell references when he refers to Gadamer's hermeneutics, we see the idea that the world already has conceptual structure. I have my doubts about this idea, but I see it as an attempt to prevent the coherentism that McDowell (and here I do agree with him) thinks is so unacceptable. Rorty characterizes McDowell's idea of answerability as an attempt to view the world as a kind of conversational partner. Since McDowell wants to avoid falling back into the Given, such a characterization makes sense. But as Taylor suggests, it also means that the space of nature can never produce beliefs that are not mediated by things inhabiting the space of reasons. Instead of solving the problem of justification, it may just push it back a step.

McDowell maintains that the idea of "second nature" prevents this discourse from being pushed back a step. What we receive through second nature is direct (although it first must receive conceptual structure through *Bildung*). In saying this, McDowell is able to talk about our awareness of the empirical content of our beliefs without falling back into the Given since, through second nature, introspection does not contemplate an unmediated given. But as Michael Williams points out, even though it is not a Berkeleyan form of idealism, it is still a form of idealism in that it imbues the world "with quasi-linguistic objects called 'thinkable' contents."[357] But what McDowell is getting at resembles what Taylor argued earlier: When we make a claim, such as, "The earth orbits the sun," we do not mean that the world lacks planets and stars "but contains thinkable contents." That, McDowell acknowledges, would be absurd. What he maintains is that, given the fact there are planets and stars (stated in an unpuzzling sense of what seems to be the case), saying that world conceived as everything that is the case also contains planets and starts—which are not thinkable contents—that are in it, is a claim that we make with the idea of world-directedness already presupposed. So, like a background assumption, this understanding of world-directedness argues against the subjectivism or non-realism implicit in what Taylor is calling mediational theories. It is something that traverses the cause/justification distinction.

Again these are preliminary speculations, but I do think we see a difference between (1) the acknowledgment that there is no unmediated access to a given and (2) the conscious embrace of a linguistic theory that depicts every attempt to connect interpretation to "non-linguistic" structures as an example of doing metaphysics. Critics of Rorty accept (1) that we must abjure

[357] Williams, "Fatal Attraction: John McDowell's Defence of Empiricism," 192.

mythical givenness, but, in various ways, they all express reservations concerning (2) Rorty's therapeutic solution. With Taylor, I find that Rorty's treatment of language does seem like a representational theory that, in spite of its intent to be therapeutic and side-step epistemological skepticism, ends-up making claims about language and representation that, at times, look rather reductionist. This is another way of saying that Rorty's treatment of language is actually a theory of language that, as Bernstein points out above, is overly concerned with metaphilosophical issues. It may help here to think of a distinction Heidegger makes between theories that change the ways in which entities come to sight for us, owing to the concerns we have for knowledge in the context of our embeddedness in a world of daily concerns, and knowledge of entities removed from their ordinary, everyday context in the lifeworld. Heidegger writes:

> The environment announces itself afresh. What is thus lit up is not itself just one thing ready-to-hand among others; still less is it something *present-at-hand* upon which equipment ready-to-hand is somehow founded: it is in the 'there' before anyone has observed or ascertained it. It is itself inaccessible to circumspection, so far as circumspection is always directed towards entities; but in each case it has already been disclosed for circumspection. 'Disclose' and 'disclosedness' will be used as technical terms…and shall signify 'to lay open' and 'the character of having been laid open.' Thus 'to disclose' never means anything like 'to obtain indirectly by inference'.[358]

Is the discussion of language "lit up" in a specific way when language is discussed in the context of theory? In such a discussion, language itself is the both "the house of Being" (the home where "human beings dwell") and a tool for problem solving.[359] While it seems certain that Descartes failed to understand the significance of language and the role it plays in the

[358] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1962), 105.
[359] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, trans., David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 217.

construction of concepts, to see us humans as people who "carry about a set of words" as Rorty does, seems to do something similar.

The strangeness of the idea that we carry about a set of words should not, in my view, be overlooked. It is, to be sure, a way of speaking that makes sense, but not until one becomes familiar with Rorty's cause/justification distinction as well as the one he erects between the private and public spheres. What I am suggesting is that Rorty is giving us a theoretical treatment of language that removes it from its natural home. Sentences come to sight in a present-at-hand mode of revealing rather than as ready-to-hand. It is not that there is a right way in Heidegger's analysis for entities to present themselves, but as present-at-hand, sentences lose their connection to the background assumptions that had been unproblematic, especially our realist intuitions that seem to make us answerable to the world.

We also "care" about our activities in light of all the other concerns we have in our respective cultures. Human beings are not "field linguists" observing society and dispassionately deciding how to do things with words.[360] We can take an outsider's perspective on linguistic behavior, but this might cause us to miss what is most urgent in what we speak about. In a Kierkegaardian (and Heideggerian) sense, we can keep a choice at arm's length, pretending for the moment that the choice does not involve an important aspect of ourselves. But the subjective way of knowing and the objective way of knowing are stances that we take towards ourselves, other people, and the external material world.[361] This embeddedness is more fundamental than the description. Emphasizing the choice of descriptions brings to mind, ironically, Rorty's

[360] This is a reference to the book with the same title. See J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words*, ed. J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà (Cambridge, Mass, Harvard Univ. Press, 1962).
[361] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 163.

mirror metaphor in which a "thinker" dispassionately inspects the contents of her conscious mind to see which representations correctly correspond to what is outside. Rorty's conception of justification attacks the idea of correspondence, but descriptions are still representations and, as such, they still presuppose the Outer/Inner distinction referenced above by Taylor. Paired with the nature/reason dualism, we see a linguistic re-thinking of epistemological problems that makes our belief in moral rightness and representative realism, in science, quirky beliefs that can (theoretically) be eliminated without remainder.

6.3 Essential Structure Talk

In closing, I would like to take a final look at Rorty's separation of the private and public realms. In Chapter Two, I mentioned the criticism Guignon and Hiley advance concerning Rorty's idea of linguistic redescription and the "disembodied" self his picture of knowledge paints. They also think Rorty's separation of the public and private spheres reveals a problem stemming from the tension between "communitarian" and "existentialist" strands of thought present in contemporary debates about knowledge and the self. Rorty is aware of this tension. The impossibility of synthesizing these two realms is a central feature of his idea of linguistic redescription and narrative self-creation. But Guignon and Hiley are skeptical of Rorty's project. They agree about the need to move beyond epistemology-centered philosophy, but they question the pragmatic approach Rorty employs. Although Rorty wants to combine the best of both the communitarian and existentialist strands of thought into a linguistified view of the self, they think his approach fails to recognize the effects of historicity and cultural-situatedness on our

present perspective.[362] This has implications for his recommendations concerning how best to proceed:

> The hermeneutic approach accepts most of the conclusions of anti-foundationalism: since we have no access to uninterpreted 'facts' about ourselves, it is best to think of the self as a web of self-interpretations drawn from the vocabularies circulating in our historical context. But it also holds that self-interpreting activity and historicity themselves provide the resources for formulating an account of the self as unified and focused. Heidegger's conception of philosophy as involving a 'two-fold task' provides the model for the two key moves generally found in the hermeneutic strategy. The first move is to claim that even though all interpretations are shaped by historically shifting vocabularies, there is nevertheless what Heidegger calls an underlying 'essential structure' of self-interpreting activity which can be identified by phenomenology or by reflection on our ordinary ways of describing ourselves. This quasi-Kantian 'formalist' move is supposed to reveal the conditions for the possibility of any interpretation whatsoever. The move appears in Heidegger's account of the ongoing 'happening' of our lives as rooted in the 'formal existential totality' of human 'temporality'.[363]

As they see it, an antifoundationalism that eschews all talk of "structures" in the name of avoiding metaphysics, fails to recognize the significance of the "insider's perspective" essential to the hermeneutical approach. Rorty's pragmatism winds-up emphasizing the ironist notion of self-enlargement. His critique of correspondence leads to a form of detachment that hermeneutically-minded thinkers lack.[364] The self-focus (rather than self-enlargement) of

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[362] Rorty characterizes his epistemological behaviorism as an attempt to show how we can "linguistify" Cartesian subjectivity.

[363] Guignon and Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality," 347.

[364] One can think of Søren Kierkegaard's distinction between the subjective way of knowing, that involves an important aspect of a person's being, and the objective way of knowing, which makes the individual accidental. See Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, 162-63. "The path of objective reflection makes the subject accidental, and existence thereby into something indifferent, vanishing. Away from the subject, the path of reflection leads to the objective truth, and while the subject and his subjectivity become indifferent, the truth becomes that too, and just this is its objective validity; because interest, just like decision, is rooted in subjectivity. The path of objective reflection now leads to abstract thinking, to mathematics, to historical knowledge of various kinds, and always leads away from the subject, whose existence or non-existence becomes, and from the objective point of view quite rightly, infinitely indifferent–yes, quite rightly, for as Hamlet says, existence and non-existence have only subjective significance."

Heidegger, better enables us to pursue communitarian goals such as "social service," "civic responsibility," and "brotherly love."[365]

As I argue above, it might be that Rorty's analytical presuppositions lead him to suspect various forms of reflection as instances of correspondence metaphysics. Hermeneutically-minded thinkers, such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, are comfortable talking about moods and feelings of power. Rorty sees in this an attempt to locate the "real person" inside, the self that Descartes finds through conscious introspection. It seems to be introspection itself that Rorty, at times, seems to try and avoid. This is the same "inner person" that behaviorism seeks to displace with its empirical approach to behavioral analysis. Rorty is not a behaviorist or a logical positivist, but these traditions still seem to exert an influence on his thought.

Heidegger too is critical of Cartesian reflection. But Heidegger is not saying that subject-object thinking is "bad," so we should just stop doing it. He is saying, in my view, that reflection contains structures, such as care, that make the "thing" that comes to sight, for us and for Descartes, one of the ways in which entities can present themselves to us. The care-structure is part of the Cartesian analysis that presents man's being-in-the-world as a thinking thing. But the essence of a person is not a conscious thinking thing that just happens to be located in a culture and at a particular point in time. Time is in us. As we engage in reflection, the care-structure changes the being of entities that become issues for us.[366]

In short, in the interpretation I offer, it is significant, for the idea of justification, that hermeneutically-minded thinkers stress the contributions that we make to what comes to sight for

[365] Guignon and Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality," 361.
[366] We can think of Rorty's idea that human beings "carry about a set of words" in contrast to Heidegger's emphasis on time. For Heidegger, it may be more accurate to say not that time is in us but, rather, we *are* time.

us through reflection. Rorty does talk about "needs," but these are represented as desires for security that stem from the tradition we have inherited. And, as we have seen, these desires are not related to the space of nature or the deepest level of the self. Justification deals with relationships only to other beliefs; correspondence seeks to connect beliefs to nonhuman structures outside the language-game. For Rorty, reflection itself is part and parcel to the correspondence metaphysics he finds problematic. What is given—what is available at the level of conscious introspection—is not justified by our embeddedness in the world or by our moods. This also applies to feelings of power since, as Rorty explained with respect to Nietzsche and Foucault, these are present before our minds and thought to be justified by knowledge of how things are (although Rorty will admit that a feeling might be "caused" by what we see or feel—no such thing as power is actually related to states of affairs in the world). Guignon and Hiley do not see the hermeneutical approach as one that falls back into epistemology-centered philosophy through its emphasis on the insider's perspective. However, they observe that Rorty's antifoundationalism eschews such an approach, to a fault, in the name of avoiding metaphysics:

> Rorty regards the hermeneutic strategy as a failure of nerve, as a retreat from following anti-foundationalism through to its inevitable conclusions. In his view, both the formalist and contextualist moves are red herrings. The attempt to discover 'essential structures' of life by phenomenology or by insight into our own agency still operates on the assumption that we can gain access to timeless truths about the human condition. If all self-interpretations are by-products of current language-games, however, then our interpretations of our own agency or of our own self-interpreting activity are either ephemeral images shaped by our present vocabularies or vestiges of a metaphysical tradition we would do well to discard.[367]

In avoiding metaphysics, in avoiding talk of anything thought to be an essential structre, Rorty winds up opposing the justificatory schemes that emphasize world-directedness, such as we see

[367] Guignon and Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality," 348.

in the work McDowell and Taylor, as well as the talk of structures that we see in Habermas and Heidegger. A diverse group of theorists from Plato forward think we need to ground knowledge claims in something outside current cultural practices. The idea that the only constraints placed on us are the conversational ones, the ones we acknowledge as we construct sentences on that side of the cause/justification divide where human beings learn languages, seems to miss the relevance of non-linguistic background assumptions for our view of ourselves and our place in the surrounding society.

If the idea of the Prison-House of Language is analogous to the situation faced by the prisoners in Plato's Cave in the *Republic*, then there is, in Rorty's view, nothing "outside" or beneath language. The solution for Rorty is not to show how talk of essential structures can be made to look good, the solution is to avoid all talk of correct representation: This means that both authenticity talk and world-directness talk presuppose the existence of justificatory schemes that privilege the nonhuman. Talk of how things are, as Rorty understands it, is involved even in structure and authenticity talk. Conscious introspection reveals only beliefs (in propositional form). To say that my stance is authentic is to say that there is a difference between one claim and another. Even if the claim is not correct with respect to how things are, the claim is still "better" with respect to my attitude. And, as Taylor argues, this has something to do with states of affairs in the world that I do not "choose" to acknowledge. Logically, this is still correspondence (even if we think of it as formal in structure). However, as Rorty understands matters, it is still an attempt to answer the epistemological skeptic.

What I take the hermeneutic tradition to contribute, as Guignon and Hiley explain with an eye towards Heidegger, is that even if we are doing what Rorty would call metaphysics, we are

trying to live and make decisions in a social world that matters to us. We experience moral dilemmas because of our ability to take up care-relationships towards entities around us in our culture. Care is wrapped up with our historicity and cultural-situatedness. Seen in this way, our responses to what is going on in the world tell us something about ourselves as individuals; they speak, or at least they have the potential to speak, to our authenticity.[368] Rorty embraces the concreteness of social practice, but he also embraces the idea that our descriptions can change what we think of "reality." This has the effect, as McDowell points out, of making the content of our empirical beliefs mysterious. As my concluding remarks show, we see something analogous to McDowell's criticism in the hermeneutical tradition as well. But while these thinkers have no interest in reviving empiricism, they do think that Rorty's idea of linguistic redescription forces us to take up an outsider's stance with respect to the entities that come to sight for us in our respective societies. In my view, this is another way of saying that Rorty's approach makes the content of our empirical beliefs mysterious.

But all of this is theoretical. This is especially the case with the Myth of the Given and the cause/justification distinction. Although Rorty is critical of theory, the re-thinking of philosophical problems linguistically functions on both a concrete and a theoretical level. Before avoiding correspondence becomes an issue, we already care about our being and our place in the surrounding culture. These concerns form the insider's perspective Guignon and Hiley reference. These are part of what they say Heidegger and philosophical hermeneutics mean by essential structures. Because of the "essential structure," one possibility for choice is accepting the avoidance of metaphysics as a goal. But such a goal could only exist once a person has

[368] They note that Rorty seems suspicious of the concept of authenticity.

already taken-up care relationships to elements of the tradition she accepts or rejects. Talk of what is fundamental or essential may be problematic, and Rorty's pragmatism shows us its potential pitfalls. But it does seem, in my view, that normative validity involves more than correspondence to existing social practices or to what our peers will allow us to get away with saying. World-directedness, background assumptions, realist intuitions, and the implicit, non-linguistic know-how of an interpreter who cares about her place in a society all point, in the view I am recommending, to structures (relevant, thick, and Rational), that do not reside, exclusively, within the logical space of reasons.

Unlike hermeneutically-minded thinkers, I do have an interest in reviving empiricism. Rorty fears that such a move threatens to resurrect the "epistemology industry." The issue turns on whether "truth" involves applying concepts correctly to the world or accepting that truth and justification deal only with relationships between humans. I have argued, in this dissertation, that Rorty's social and linguistic treatment of justification gives away a notion of truth that I think we need to retain.

Rorty, of course, understands the reasons for his critic's reservations. And he is comfortable saying that justification—answering objections to the belief we hold—is never a matter of correspondence to a nonhuman standard. But in a manner that harkens back to Descartes's nonphysical thinking thing, a comparison that I am sure would cause Rorty to chafe, his treatment of justification tells us what truth is not. Once we abandon correspondence, we can begin to accept his therapeutic recommendations. We can begin to accept that truth is simply what our peers will allow us to get away with saying. But this, in my view, does not tell us what justification is. And it seems that one of the things that determine whether or not our statements

are accepted as true by our peers has something to do with whether or not our "descriptions" fit the world. The line Rorty draws between linguistic redescription and correspondence (coping with the world and copying it) becomes hard to see. For this reason, I have expressed reservations with the idea that the only constraints on our interpretations are the conversational ones we find within the logical space of reasons. Not only is this conception of justification "frictionless," it seems to border on a version of linguistic idealism.

I began by saying that I have an interest in words and things. Perhaps, as my treatment of Rorty's conception of justification reveals, my primary interest tilts more in the direction of things. My fear is that if justification has nothing to do with answerability to the world, we will have no means by which to distinguish between a true statement and an ideological one. To say, as Rorty does, that an *apologia* for the status quo or an instance of political demagoguery that borders on Orwellian "newspeak" are simply bad ideas seems, in my view, to be an insufficient condemnation of the notion of an "alternative fact."

Rorty would, of course, deplore the same ideological statements as I do, and his long career as a philosopher and a public intellectual demonstrate this clearly. The difference, he would probably say, is that people who are sympathetic to a minimalist realism think we need to find something that can be described as being on both sides of the nature/reason divide; whereas, his view of knowledge (the philosophical therapy he recommends) aims to make us more comfortable with contingency. While I share Richard Rorty's desire to move beyond the epistemological skepticism inherent in the language of objectivity, I think we still need to retain, in our conception of justification, an aspect of world-directedness that permits us to speak rationally about the nonhuman

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